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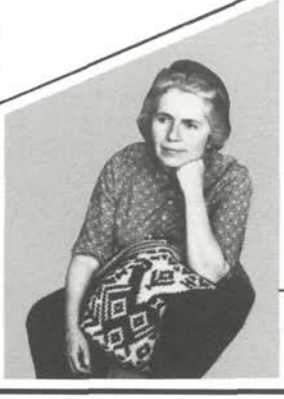

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TO OUR READERS

A new book by an Advisory Editor and one edited by a Contributing Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW have recently been published. In accordance with our policy, the books will not be reviewed in these pages, but are listed below for the interest of our readers:

HAYDEN CARRUTH: *Suicides and Jazzers.* The University of Michigan Press. $34.50; $13.95.

JOHN LOUGHERY, ed.: *First Sightings: Contemporary Stories of American Youth.* Persea Books. $29.95; $11.95.

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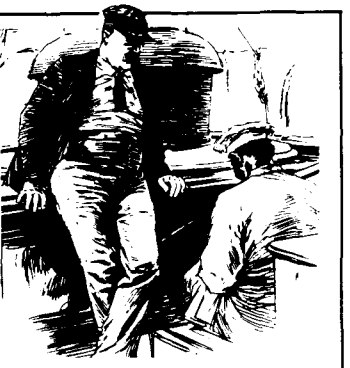

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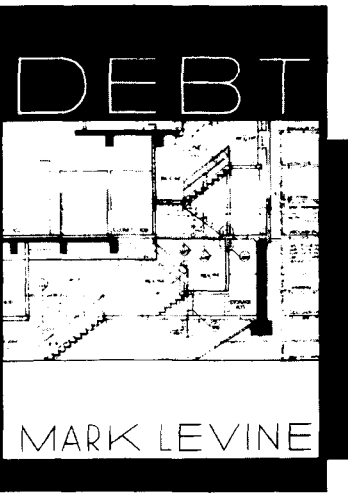

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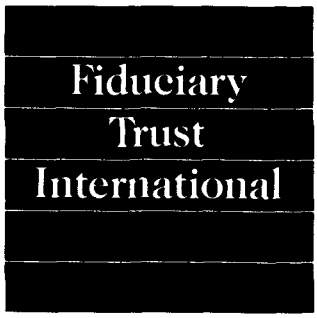

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ABRAHAM PAIS

"The Impossible Real"

I have heard it said that a witness to past disasters often finds it impossible to make clear to others what he or she is talking about. I am no exception. When I hear myself talk to others about World War II experiences of mine, I invariably have a peculiar sensation. I hear my own words, know that I speak the truth as honestly as I can, yet cannot believe what I hear myself saying. In other words, the me of those past days has become totally estranged from the me of today. Dissociative reactions like these are fairly common among survivors of suffering and sorrow, as recorded case histories demonstrate. Maurice Blanchot has coined an elegant expression for this sort of experience: "The impossible real."

I have observed that the norms of human conduct do not apply in the stressful times of war. I should now add that—as my own case illustrates—the same appears to be true of some aspects of the behavior of survivors. Only twice in the years since World War II have I been able to get in touch with the enormously strong pain and hurt that lie hidden within me.

The first occasion was during one of my several stays in Jerusalem when I visited for the first time the memorial Yad Vashem. The name means "a monument and a name," a superbly chosen quotation from Isaiah 56:5: "I will give in my house a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off." The memorial is built on a hilltop near Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

The most impressive and moving part of Yad Vashem is its Memorial Hall (Ohel Yizkor). The interior, with its granite dome and floor, gives a sinister impression, meant to convey aspects of concentration camps. It is sparsely lit, to bring into focus the eternal flame burning in the center of the floor, in front of which ashes of murdered Jews are interred.

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After entering the Memorial Hall, I was given a *keppel*, a head covering male Jews, and also Gentiles, are obliged to wear when entering a Jewish sanctuary or place of worship. I walked up to a balustrade, behind which lies the message of the memorial, chiseled into the floor's granite. It is a stark and extraordinarily powerful one. Just the names of 22 camps: Auschwitz, Belźec, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Chelmno, Dachau, Drancy, Flossenbürg, Kaiserwald, Majdanek, Mauthausen, Natzweiler, Neuengamme, Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen, Sobibor, Stutthof, Szebnie, Theresienstadt, Treblinka, Westerbork, Zemun.

When I stood there, reading those names, something completely unexpected happened to me that has never occurred before or since. I started yelling loudly. No tears. These were the wounded cries of an animal. Even as I was doing so I could simultaneously understand what was happening to me. After many years I had finally come in touch with pain, deep inside, which could not be expressed in ordinary words in everyday settings.

I have visited Yad Vashem on two later occasions. On the second visit I only wept quietly. On the third I did not even do that, just stood there in a solemn, somber mood. Which only corroborates the well-known fact that repeated exposure to events or their images diminishes the impact. That was also evident to me as I walked through Yad Vashem's exhibit of photographs (I believe they are mostly from Bergen-Belsen), showing emaciated human beings, barely alive, and piles of corpses. While these pictures never fail to make an impression, they affected me much less strongly than the starkness of the Memorial Hall. I had seen the pictures too often, there and elsewhere.

It seems to me that the total absence of death camp photographs only serves to enhance the Frenchman Claude Lanzmann's *Sho'ah*, his monumental documentary film about the extermination of the European Jews, to my taste the most powerful and moving account of those events. Seeing the film on television, in 1991, provided the second occasion on which I experienced my old pain.

The film consists of a series of interviews with survivors and with people who lived near the camps, interspersed with pictures of those camps, not as they were then but as they look

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now, and with shots of trains moving toward one campsite or another. For hours I sat transfixed, watching the stories unfold.

One interview that particularly affected me was with a Jew who had been a barber before being deported and who in camp had been assigned to cutting off the hair of women, for reasons of "hygiene." Actually, they were about to be gassed; their hair was subsequently sent on for industrial purposes. The barbershop was situated right next to the gas chambers. He and his fellow workers were strictly forbidden to talk to the women, who were all naked by then, on pain of being gassed themselves. At one point our man sees the wife and sister of his best friend enter, both of whom he knows very well. He cannot say a word to them. Then he sees them march off to their doom.

Up to that moment the barber had spoken casually, almost businesslike, about his experiences, as he had also done in earlier parts of the documentary. When, however, he came to the point of describing how he saw those two women walk to the gas chambers, he fell apart completely, overwhelmed by the pain of memory. The very same thing happened to me as I sat there by myself watching him. For a long time I sobbed uncontrollably. It was not because of the scene he was describing—I was never in a camp myself—but because the sequence—first talking casually, then breaking down—resonated with my own pain, likewise hidden most of the time.

I feel that common language is inadequate to those events, which were too singular to be described by such terms as horror, tragedy, disaster. Those words sound too worn to serve their well-meant purposes. For the same reason I refuse to use the H-word, in writing as well as in speech. I have a visceral dislike of people like Eli Wiesel, professional *shewa* sitters,[1] who make a living from H-word tales.

If I am not clear as to whether this past contains lessons, and if I am not sure that my language has been adequate, then why do I write of these memories at all? My purpose, I think, is to show how one may find it possible to emerge from catastrophe into a fulfilling life.

[1] *Shewa*, meaning seven, refers to the number of days Orthodox Jews sit in mourning for the death of a next-of-kin.

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I was born in Holland, and there I was, in the autumn of 1941, with my Ph.D. from the University of Utrecht in my pocket but without a job. I had only a small amount of money at my disposal. I had, however, ideas on how to continue the line of physics research I had begun in preparation for my doctorate, and went to work on these. Sometime between then and June 1942 (I don't remember precisely when), when Jews were forbidden to use trains, I moved back from my room near Utrecht to my parents' home in Amsterdam. During that period, I traveled regularly to Utrecht to discuss my research with Professor Rosenfeld, my adviser. He and his wife graciously offered me a place to sleep in their home, so that I could spend an extra day or two talking about my work. They are both gone now. My memories of them are affectionate and respectful.

In the autumn of 1941, Jewish children were barred from public schools; the Jewish community now provided schooling for them. Teachers for these schools were in demand. I felt I should participate; I could also use the few extra guilders. I still have a yellowed letter dated May 3, 1942, confirming that I teach mathematics in the youth center at Plantage Franschelaan 13, as well as at a center for adult education at Nicolaas Witsenkade 14. I also have an identity card dated October 13, 1942, issued by the JR (*Joodse Raad,* or Jewish Council) and signed by Presidents Abraham Asscher and David Cohen, which states, in Dutch and German, that I am an *Oberlehrer* (secondary school teacher) who is *unentbehrlich* (indispensable) to the education of Jewish pupils.

Almost from the start I had to walk to get to my place of work. In June public transportation was forbidden to Jews. In addition I had to hand in my bike at that time.

The really bad times had started. Since May I'd worn a star. In July deportations were initiated. In September the stamp drama began. The first in my family to get a stamp was my father. Between June and September he had received four different bilingual legitimization cards, two issued by the Office of Social Affairs of the city of Amsterdam, two by the JR, stating that he was *Religionshauptlehrer* (headmaster for religious education). Then, on September 30, he received a stamp on his ID card stating that until further notice the holder was exempt

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from mobilization for labor. The stamp was numbered 82.226. It was one of the so-called 80.000 series, issued to those connected with the JR. If my father counted among these, it was not because of any involvement with deportation measures but simply because he taught at a Jewish school.

For that same reason an 80.000 stamp, no. 85.303, was issued to me as well, on October 6. On February 11, 1943, mine, however, was upgraded to a 40.000 stamp, no. 40.874, one of the 640 stamps in that most coveted category of all, Jews enjoying various forms of German protection.

The institution of that classification had been the result of initiatives by the Dutch Secretaries General of the Interior and especially of Education, Science, and the Protection of Culture. These men had been able to convince the Germans that there was a small group of Jews who had contributed so much to advancing Holland's cultural life that they deserved preferential treatment. What had brought me into such company? I had been a University assistant, an appointment which in its time had gone to the Minister of Education in The Hague for approval, so that I was registered as a Jew who had lost a nationally recognized position. My assistantship in physics may actually have added very little to the culture of the Netherlands, yet this official registration sufficed to make me a candidate for a 40.000 exemption.

I turn now to my sister Annie, who was nearly twenty when the war came to Holland. Already earlier, in October 1939, she had become engaged to Herman de Leeuw, a young Jewish businessman. I believe that he too had managed to obtain an 80.000 stamp. People used to pull strings in those days. They married in May 1942. I recall how my family first went to Amsterdam's City Hall for the civil wedding, then to the Sephardic synagogue for the religious ceremony. There she sat, my pretty little sister, under the *chuppah*,[2] wearing a lovely white dress—with a star attached. Afterward we had a fine dinner. I do not remember where that took place, but can recall the main course: sweetbreads, hard to get in those days, with peas-in-the-pod.

[2] Literally baldachin, under which the betrothed sit during the ceremony. The word has come to mean the marriage ritual as a whole.

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Annie's marriage abruptly transformed her personality. From a rather indolent girl she turned into a young woman who took charge. How well I recall looking at her with new respect and increased affection. Because of her marriage, she shared the protection of her young husband's stamp.

One late evening around the end of 1942, I was in my upstairs room in my parents' home when suddenly I heard yelling and shrieking in the room next to mine, in the house next door. It was the bedroom of an old man in his eighties, a Jew. I knew at once what was happening: Germans had come in to take him away. There I stood, one ear glued to the wall, listening to those terrible and frightening noises that went on for some twenty minutes. Then all became silent. The next morning I learned that my guess had been correct. My old neighbor, in his nightclothes, had been clinging to his bed, refusing to move and yelling for mercy. He was gone. The Germans had struck meters away from me.

My father had three brothers and three sisters, all married. My mother had one brother and one sister, both unmarried, and another sister who was a widow. My mother's father, well into his seventies, was my only grandparent then still alive. I had five cousins in all. Of these, only one sister of my father and her two children survived (she had been married to a non-Jew), as well as one cousin from my mother's side who went into hiding. The other seventeen family members were deported and never returned. How could these gentle people possibly have harmed Germany? It is the kind of question every survivor keeps mulling over when thinking of lost dear ones . . .

When I began courting Tineke Buchter in the days before the war, it was my custom on Saturday afternoons to go to her home at Nieuwe Zyds Voorburgwal 282 and stay over until Sunday. Tineke, a non-Jew strongly involved with Jewish issues, lived there with Marie, her mother (who was divorced), of whom I also became very fond. Marie's mother would also often be there, a spry, corpulent, determined little lady. After the summer of 1940, when my parents had accepted her,

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Tineke would come to our home Friday nights for the weekly festive Sabbath dinner and would stay over.

By 1941 Tineke and I had begun to drift apart a little. That nothing ever came of our relationship was entirely due to my own immaturity. Yet we remained close, and her most important role in my life was yet to come, as will soon be seen. We stayed close until in the beginning of 1946 I left Holland, to return only for short visits. Now Tineke is an esteemed psychiatrist living near New York City. We continue to see each other occasionally, have tea or dinner together, and, of course, talk of old times. Our bonds remain strong. She was and still is one of the most important persons in my life.

Tineke and Marie's home became a haven for hunted people almost from the day of Holland's capitulation. In the first days of the occupation, those who sought refuge were not so much Jews as persons who feared incarceration because of their political convictions. As the situation grew more and more threatening for Jews, they began to be hospitably taken in, not so much for prolonged stays as in transit to safe premises. Tineke chiefly, but also Marie, became increasingly active in helping to find hiding places.

When deportations started in the summer of 1942, I began to think seriously of going into hiding myself. I had sworn to myself that I would never respond to any order to move to a place where Germans would have direct control over my movements. My exemption stamps gave me some respite, but I never for a moment believed that their guarantees would last. I first discussed my hiding plan with Tineke, who fully agreed and pledged her help. Some time thereafter I talked it over with my parents, urging them to make similar plans. I vividly recall their response. My father said he felt he had to go to a labor camp when called up because of his intense feelings of solidarity with his fellow Jews. Whereupon my mother said, "Go if you want to—but I won't." In the event, she prevailed. I did not have such discussions with my sister because after her marriage she and her husband had moved to an apartment of their own. I have happy memories of visits there, in particular of a nice lunch Annie prepared for Herman, me, and herself.

In the fall of 1942, I was unofficially informed that I was under consideration for a high class 40.000 stamp. That would

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give me extra respite, but my mind was nevertheless made up. At an appropriate moment I would go into hiding. Tineke had meanwhile arranged a place for me. I began to make preparations. Little by little I would bring clothes of mine to Tineke's house, for temporary storage. Next came my better books—with my name on the flyleaf cut out. I left behind books of my youth, the adventures of Pietje Bel, of Dik Trom, of *Prikkebeen*, as well as my schoolbooks. All of these are lost. In later years I have wished off and on to hold them in my hands again. This is one of the ways—by no means the worst—in which I feel cut off from my childhood.

Then I began to take from a Jewish acquaintance some lessons in indoor physical exercise, since I wished to be prepared for keeping physically fit during a period of confinement which might well be prolonged. A student friend of mine gave me a pair of lightweight dumbbells to be used for exercise purposes; these too were duly stored with Tineke.

At that juncture an unforeseen alternative came my way. My early Zionist friends Síeg Gitter and Leah Neubauer, now married, had begun planning their own escape from Holland via Belgium and France to Spain. They asked me whether I would like to join them—at their own rather substantial expense. I asked for one day's time to think this over.

I decided to decline their truly generous offer. At that time I was deeply immersed in theoretical physics research. I could not imagine abandoning that work nor see how I could concentrate on it while I was in flight. That, much more than the obvious risks of the enterprise, held me back. So there came a day when I embraced the two of them and from the bottom of my heart wished them *bon voyage*. They did make it to Spain, and from there to Argentina.

In 1943 I made my own move—inside Holland. On January 13, the Secretary General of Education, Science and Cultural Affairs signed a letter addressed to me, written in German. At the heading stood: *Betrifft Arbeitseinsatz* (concerns mobilization of labor). The text read: "I hereby inform you that I have called the attention of the [German] General Commissioner for Special Affairs to your situation. He has agreed to give the matter special consideration." It was the formal announcement that I would get a 40.000 stamp which, as mentioned, I indeed

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received in February. While I was of course pleased, I did not change my plans.

On March 12 I received a form letter signed by the Secretary General for the Interior, this one in Dutch. It said: "I have the honor to inform you that you will neither be transported to Amsterdam nor put to work in a work camp abroad." The mention of transport did not apply to me but to Jews living outside the capital. The reference to no deportation had to do with the decision made meanwhile to move all holders of 40.000 stamps to De Schaffelaar, a small chateau in Barneveld, a little town in the province of Utrecht, this to prevent their accidental capture in *razziahs* (round ups). Some had moved there the previous December; the rest had to move now. That, I decided, was the ideal moment for me to go to the hiding place Tineke had arranged for me. If people wondered where I was, my parents could simply say that I had gone to Barneveld. On March 19, I arrived at my hide-out.[3]

My new home was a patrician house on one of Amsterdam's famous old canals, Keizersgracht 499—not far from Anne Frank's place of hiding. My host, Mr. Koehorst—I called him "Pa"—was a gentleman tailor who had his workshop downstairs. The rest of the family consisted of his wife, Ma, two sons, Lou, a few years younger than I, and his younger brother Rob and one daughter, about my age, Alwien, a very pretty young woman. The family quarters were in the building's top two floors. I had a pleasant room on the top floor to myself. It was on the whole a cheery family, though I could feel some tension between the parents (who divorced after the War). We took our meals together, otherwise I spent my time in my own room.

I had a false identity card, under the name Arthur Meerwaldt, M.D., with of course my own picture inserted. The card,

[3] A few words about the fate of the Barnevelders, as those who went there came to be called. They lived in an island of tranquility, cut off from the rest of the world. Life was not unpleasant. Schooling for children and evening lectures for adults were organized by the participants themselves. Food was tolerable. So it remained until September 29, 1943, the day on which the JR in Amsterdam was dissolved. On that same day, Germans arrived in Barneveld and gave the inmates thirty minutes to pack for transport to Westerbork. In September 1944 they were transported from there to Theresienstadt, the better-class concentration camp. From there, some were brought to Switzerland in the spring of 1945; the others were liberated by Soviet armed forces and returned safely to Holland. Had I gone to Barneveld, I would therefore most probably have survived.

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provided by Tineke, was most probably a real card voluntarily "lost" by its owner, who could apply for a new one. From now on I was called Ad or Adje. On arrival I still had my own valid ration card. Later I would get one stolen from a card distribution office. A financial arrangement with my hosts had been agreed upon, whereby I paid them a reasonable monthly sum for room and board. The money came from the sale of my father's stamp collection. He had been a collector since his youth, though spending only modest sums of money on his hobby. He had a very presentable set of albums. For example, he had a complete set of Dutch stamps from the first issue on (dating, I seem to remember, from the 1850s). In those war days there was great demand among the well-to-do for diamonds and for stamps, since both these items take up very little space and could be stored in tiny containers that were fire- and bombproof—and could easily be hidden. At that time the value of my father's collection must have risen to many thousands of dollars, which provided for the material security of our family.

And so I settled in for a life that may be called carefree—given the circumstances. I developed a regular routine. Every day, all through my years in hiding, I did forty-five minutes of physical exercise before breakfast, in front of an open window with curtains closed and another forty-five minutes in the late afternoon before dinner. I gave hours of each day to research, helped by the few books I had with me. These included one I had specially bought in preparation for my isolation: Volume 24, part 1, of the *Handbuch der Physik*, an 800-page tome that contained the best summaries of what was known about quantum physics to date. It is by far the most expensive book I have ever bought; it still graces my shelves in my present university office. If I had need for books not in my possession—that happened only infrequently—Tineke would fetch them for me from the university library. I would interrupt my studies once in a while for a chat with Lou, who worked at home as a tailor in his father's business. I would also spend long hours reading belles-lettres.

I of course keenly felt—especially in the beginning—the restrictions imposed on my movements: I could never be out on the streets or enjoy casual encounters with friends and acquaintances. This lack of stimulus caused me to do something I had

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never done before: keep a diary, in which I wrote regularly during the remaining war years, noting events, unbosoming feelings, recording thoughts and ideas. It was shortly after the war that, in a fit of melancholy, I burned those diaries. It was an irrational and in fact futile attempt to rid myself of very painful memories. Now I find the act both understandable and regrettable. Had I not done so, I would now have documents about the daily life of one who lived practically next door to Anne Frank—but who survived. Those lost diaries would certainly have been a valuable help in the present undertaking.

On May 19, exactly two months after vanishing from the surface of the earth, I reached my twenty-fifth birthday. My hosts made it a pleasant day for me, but there were of course no family or friends dropping in, nor even letters in the mail. Not one person of my past life knew where I was, except for Tineke. That was one of the crucial precautionary rules of the times. The less you knew the better, in case you got caught. Not even torture can make you confess what you do not know.

Dear Tineke saw to it, however, that I would get an occasional letter that she would pick up for me. I still have one of these, birthday greetings from my sister Annie, written the week after. She began by congratulating me on the "two birthdays"—Tineke, two years younger, and I were born on the same day. She further wrote that the following week she would be celebrating her first wedding anniversary with family and friends, and that she would miss me greatly on that day. Her letter went on to describe a visit to our father at his school for Jewish children. Just after she arrived the air-raid siren sounded. A war plane went right over the school; a few machine gun bullets hit the playground. Many children became hysterical; one fainted. The letter continues: "Jews who had been baptized Christian have to leave next Friday. They received a call-up at their home address, just like we did." It ends: "Perhaps we shall soon be together again." This letter is the last memento I have of my dear sister. Two weeks after having written it, she was killed.

The German letter of call-up to Annie and Herman is lost, but I still have an accompanying printed notice in Dutch, dated May 23, signed by the two JR presidents. It says: "On the strength of the accompanying call-up, the German authorities

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order you to appear on Tuesday, May 25, between eight and eighteen hours, at the constabulary barracks, Polderweg, to be put to work in Germany . . . You should note that the sharpest possible measures will be taken against you if you do not appear."

As soon as I learned of Annie's call-up, I made plans to meet with her. I do not recall the specific arrangements. In any event, one day very soon afterward I went to my parents' home, on a borrowed bike and without a star. There I found Annie waiting for me. I took her to my old room upstairs, where we sat down, and talked. The gist of what I said was to urge her most strongly not to go to the camps but rather to go into hiding with her husband. I was in a position to suggest that because Tineke and I had discussed their hiding option some time earlier, whereupon Tineke had come up with a concrete proposal for a hiding place.

Annie said no, she could not do that, because Herman had refused to entertain the idea on grounds I had heard earlier from others: Being cooped up would drive him crazy. What could I say? Even though information on gas chambers awaiting Dutch Jews had not yet reached us, all my instincts had told me: Don't go. But what arguments could I marshall against a young woman's desire to stick it out with her husband? I simply did not know what more to say to her. So we sat and talked a little more about this and that. Then I took her in my arms and hugged her. For the last time. Then I said good-bye to my parents and left forever the home of my teenage years and returned to my hiding place.

Just a few days later Alwien came into my room to tell me that Annie and Herman had departed. My reaction was what I believe amounted to hysterics. For minutes on end I cried but also laughed and felt completely irrational. Then, exhausted, I calmed down.

A few days later, my parents received a postcard from barracks 64, Westerbork, written by Herman. It read: "Dear parents, just back from a soccer match which we lost, 4-3, at the last moment. It was a great match. Annie looks well and is a wonderful and dear woman . . . We laugh a lot . . . Westerbork agrees much better with us than we anticipated . . . Food is good. Do not worry about us. Now I say farewell and hope to

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see you soon. Annie is *very well.* Kisses." It is the last sign of life we ever had from them. When the war was over, I did everything possible to find out what had happened to them, but could nowhere obtain any information. Fifty years later, in the fall of 1991, I found out.

With typical thoroughness, the Germans had classified the *Lager*, camps where Jews and others were confined, into a variety of categories—from places to stay, to concentration camps, to *Vernichtungslager*, extermination camps, the principal settings for the *Endlösung der Judenfrage*, the Final Solution. There were six of the latter. The oldest, Chelmno, sixty miles west of Warsaw, went into operation in late 1941. The other five were (distances always counted from Warsaw): Auschwitz-Birkenau, 120 miles to the southwest, also in part a concentration camp, according to Raul Hilberg, "the largest death center the world had ever seen"; Treblinka, 30 miles to the northeast; Sobibor, 80 miles to the southeast, 5 miles from the town of Wlodawa; Majdanek, near Lublin, 60 miles to the southeast; and Belźec, near Lemberg, 125 miles to the southeast.

When on January 26, 1945, Russian forces first entered Auschwitz, they found only 2,800 invalid survivors. In 1946, *Obersturmbannführer* (lieutenant-colonel) Rudolf Hoess, the camp commander, earlier a convicted murderer, would boast at the Nuremberg trials that he had overseen at Auschwitz the extermination of two and a half million persons, not counting the half million who had been allowed to succumb to starvation.[4] Present estimates, varying to within twenty percent, put the number of people killed in Auschwitz at about one million.[5]

The capacity for death at Auschwitz far exceeded that of the other killing centers. The method used was to drop crystallized prussic acid, known as Zyklon B, through an opening in the death chambers. "When the Soviets moved in, twenty-nine of the thirty-five store rooms had been burned down. In the six remaining ones, the liberators found part of the camp's legacy:

[4] William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1960), p. 664.
[5] G. Reitlinger, *The Final Solution* (London, 1953), pp. 460, 461.

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368,820 men's suits, 836,255 women's coats and dresses, large quantities of children's clothes."[6]

The first camp to be liberated by the Western Allies was Bergen-Belsen at Celle, near Hanover, in western Germany. When on April 15, 1945, British troops entered the German camp, administration had already broken down completely. Food supplies had been shut off, the starving inmates were left to their own devices, spotted typhus and diarrhea raged unchecked, tens of thousands of corpses rotted in barracks and on dung heaps, rats attacked living inmates (dead ones were eaten by starving prisoners). The British troops found 2,800 women, 12,000 men, and 13,000 unburied corpses. Another 13,000 died within a few days of liberation. After the camp was freed, every rag and stick had to be destroyed by fire.

Holland had to make its contribution. 3,722 Jews were transported from there to Belsen. Of these, 2,184 survived, the highest percentage of Jews from Holland as compared with those sent to any of the other camps. Of the 62,000 Dutch Jews sent to Auschwitz, only 1,000 survived.[7]

Of the camps mentioned, Auschwitz has become the lasting symbol of the Final Solution. It was there that the Russians found survivors who could testify to what had happened. It was also there that they found the killing machinery largely intact, as well as materials that give silent testimony to the plunder of the dead. It was about Auschwitz that Rudolf Hoess, its commander, testified freely in Nuremberg about the killings. Moreover, the ex-Auschwitzers have established a number of national committees that, every year on January 26, organize memorial meetings, events that are fittingly mentioned in the press.

By comparison, the other killing centers have caught much less public attention. Perhaps the least known of all is camp Sobibor on the river Bug, even though several hundred thousand Jews were killed there. One can understand why not much has been heard of Sobibor. First of all, when the Russians reached it, they found no signs of survivors, nor, in fact, of a camp. Already in the fall of 1943, orders had come from above

[6] Cf. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (London, 1961), p. 632.
[7] E.A. Cohen, *De negentien treinen naar Sobibor* (Amsterdam, 1979), p. 22.

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to destroy the camp without leaving a trace. The same happened in Treblinka and Belźec. This was done because by that time the German armies were already retreating from Russia. On the preceding July 15, Soviet forces had launched their first summer offensive and had since retaken Smolensk and Charkov. The area of the three death camps in eastern Poland were therefore increasingly exposed to recapture, and the German authorities were determined to keep their annihilation operations a deep secret.

After *Vernichtungslager* Sobibor had been razed, the entire terrain was planted over with saplings by thirty Jewish forced laborers, who were all shot in November 1943. It was as if the Final Solution had never taken place there. "Sobibor was Himmler's best kept secret."[8]

On the camp site now one can only find a commemorative plaque which reads: "Sobibor. A Nazi death camp stood here from May 1942 to October 1943. In it were killed 250,000 Russian POWs, Jews, Poles, and Gypsies." This is a lie since no Poles or Russians were exterminated there. The Poles, a notoriously anti-Semitic nation, would not even see fit to record who were the only sufferers.

A second reason for history's comparative silence about Sobibor is that among the millions of pages of German documents captured by the Allies in 1945, there are only three short documents referring to it. Finally, there were very few who, after the war, could tell what happened. The best estimate of Sobibor survivors is 46. As a result of all these circumstances, only a small fraction of the voluminous literature on camps is devoted to Sobibor. From these books and articles I was able to compose the following picture.

The building of the camp began in March 1942. *Obersturmbannführer* Christian Wirth was in charge of this construction project as well as of those in Belźec and Treblinka. The camp covered an area of some 170 acres and was surrounded by three seven-foot-high electrified fences. Between the middle and the outer fence lay a path that was constantly patrolled.

Extermination started in May 1942 and lasted till October 1943. The camp's commanders were first *Hauptsturmführer*

[8] R. Rashke, *Escape from Sobibor* (Boston, 1982), p. vii.

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(Captain) Franz Stangle, then *Hauptsturmführer* Frank Reichleitner. The camp staff consisted of 30 S.S. men and about 100 Ukrainians. Many tasks were performed by Jewish inmates never numbering more than one thousand; 200 of these worked near the gas chambers, on the disposal of corpses and on the sorting of their clothes. An unknown number of gypsies and of people declared insane or incurable (such as sufferers from tuberculosis) were also killed in Sobibor.

In these and related activities, German officialdom systematically aimed to leave as few traces as possible. In their documents, there is never mention of *Endlösung* but rather of *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment). Incurables were sent to "clinics." Transports to camps were labeled "labor mobilization." Such camouflage reached its extremes in the camps, where it had a further purpose: to keep the Jews calm and as long as possible unaware of what was in store for them, so that they would not revolt or warn the next arrivals of what was about to happen to them. For example, the arrival platform—transports came by train, most often in cattle cars—at Treblinka was disguised as a normal railway station with signs like *To Warsaw* and *To Bialystok*.

These precautions were especially elaborate in Sobibor. The arrival platform was situated in the *Vorlager* (front camp), the only section visible upon detraining. The rest of the camp was hidden by wooden fences. The various buildings in the *Vorlager* bore such signs as *Die Heimat Gottes* (God's Fatherland), *Das Schwalbennest* (The Swallow's Nest), *Zum lustigen Floh* (The Merry Flea). Various crossings were marked with wooden signposts reading: to the bath, to the casino, to the bowling alley. "The newly arrived would be addressed via loudspeaker by an official who told them that they would be transferred to work camps in nearby Wlodawa. Families would be kept together. Those who worked hard would be awarded certificates of good conduct. Meanwhile, they had all come a long way and would no doubt welcome a good wash in the bathhouse."[9]

From the *Vorlager* the victims walked along the Himmelfahrtallee (Ascension Boulevard), passed *Lager* 1, where the sorters and other Jews working as shoemakers, dressmakers, electri-

[9] L. de Jong, *Encounter*, December 1978, p. 20.

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cians, bakers, etc., were housed, to come to *Lager* 2, where inmate *Kommandos* deposited the luggage which the newcomers had brought with them and sorted their contents. Here also room was provided for tables and benches to write letters—never sent off.

For almost all comers, their day of arrival in Sobibor was also their day of death. The assembly-line procedure went like this. In *Lager* 2 there were barracks in which one had to strip. From there one walked to the strictly isolated *Lager* 3, which bore the sign *Lazarett* (infirmary) over the entrance gate. Women's hair was now cut. Then everyone entered the *Badehaus* (bathhouse), a single building surrounded by flowerbeds that contained the six gas chambers, each one—camouflage to the end—equipped with dummy shower fittings, each one with a capacity for exterminating 500 to 600 people at a time. Jews were driven into the chambers by Ukrainians wielding truncheons and whips and holding dogs. Those who had been unable to walk, the sick, the old, the little children, were shot separately behind the gas chambers.

After the chambers had been loaded, doors were shut and gassing began. Carbon monoxide from engine fumes was fed into the chambers, causing death in 15 to 30 minutes, unless an engine broke down. An S.S. man would look through a spy hole in the roof to make sure that everyone had suffocated. That done, doors were opened and Jewish special *Kommandos* entered, wearing gas masks and gumboots and carrying hoses to remove blood and defecation. "The twenty or so Jews who were made to clear the gas chambers were shot every few weeks and made up again by a selection from among the sorters."[10] Some *Kommando* members were ordered to check teeth for gold fillings and crowns; these teeth were ripped out with pliers. The corpses were transported to open pits where they were cremated. "Those selected for these tasks knew they had just another 4 to 6 weeks of life left to them. Quite a number, it would seem, lost their minds or committed suicide."[11]

These gassings, this hell on earth, came to an end when on October 14, 1943, several hundred Jews staged a revolt, de-

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

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scribed in the following "Report of the Security Police in the Lublin district—October 15, 1943 (City of Lublin)":

"On October 14, 1943, at about 5 P.M., a revolt of Jews in the S.S. camp Sobibor, twenty-five miles north of Chelm. They overpowered the guards, seized the armory, and after an exchange of shots with the camp garrisons, fled in unknown directions. Nine S.S. men murdered, one S.S. man missing, two foreign guards shot to death.

"Approximately 300 Jews escaped. The remainder were shot to death or are now in camp."[12] Many of the 300 escapees were subsequently murdered or betrayed by Polish and Ukrainian anti-Semites. Only 46 survived.

Between March 2 and July 20, 1943, nineteen trains, carrying in all 34,294 Jews, left Westerbork for a voyage lasting three days and three nights, making the 1,100 mile trek eastward to Sobibor. According to a man who was in Westerbork through this March-July period: "Not only after the war was the name Sobibor virtually unknown; the same was true in Westerbork during the war. The name was never mentioned in relation to the nineteen trains to Sobibor. There was reference to Auschwitz, even occasionally to Riga, but never to Sobibor. I can state this so firmly since I had transport duty in Westerbork on departure of all these nineteen deportation trains."[13] As far as I have been able to ascertain, the only Jews from Western Europe to end their trip and their lives in Sobibor were those on the nineteen trains from Westerbork.

A Polish-born survivor who saw the Jews from Holland arrive in Sobibor has said: "The Dutch bounced off the trains in furs and silk dresses or woollen suits, carrying their valuables. Unlike the Polish Jews, they were, for the most part, well educated, not Orthodox, and totally western . . . They had not been prepared for Sobibor by ghettos, typhus, starvation, fear and hatred, slow death, bullets, whips . . ."[14] Of those more than 30,000 Jews from Holland, only two survived,[15] both women:

[12] Report reproduced in English in M. Novitch, *Sobibor, Martyrdom and Revolt* (New York, 1980).
[13] E.A. Cohen, p. 23.
[14] R. Rashke, pp. 108, 109.
[15] L. de Jong, *Encounter*, December 1978, p. 20.

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Ursula Stern, German-born, and Saartje Wÿnberg. They had been in the group of 300 escapees.

Already before V-E Day, the Dutch government-in-exile had discussed the need for setting up an institution that would gather and analyze information on war events in Holland. As a result the *Rÿksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie* (Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation) was officially founded on May 8, 1945, within the week following the end of the War in Europe. It has since obtained and catalogued documents that can fill a mile and a half of stacking space. The institute is now housed in Herengracht 474, Amsterdam.[16]

I remained in Holland for most of the eight months following the end of the war. As mentioned earlier, during that time I had tried without success to find out about the fate of Annie and her husband after their departure from Westerbork. I do not remember whether or not I contacted the *Rÿksinstituut* at that time. In any event, it was a new venture then, not yet well organized. In later years I heard the Institute mentioned several times. As I started preparations for writing this memoir, it struck me that I ought to make a last try at finding out about my sister. Accordingly I wrote to Amsterdam (in Dutch, of course), asking whether they had the information I so much wanted. On September 25, 1991, I received an answer. The relevant sentence follows:

"Your sister Anna de Leeuw-Pais and her husband Herman de Leeuw were deported from Westerbork to Sobibor, where they died on June 4, 1943."

How could this date be fixed with such precision? Because it must have been known at Westerbork that they were among the 3,006 Jews who left Westerbork on June 1, and because Jews were gassed on the very day of arrival at Sobibor. I had heard of Sobibor by the time I received the letter but did not know much more about it than its name. Since then, I have read all I could lay my hands on about that camp, so that I now have an inkling of the environment in which Annie and Herman spent their final hours.

By the time I received that letter, I could no longer weep. I have in fact often wondered through the years why, after the

[16] For a history of the Institute, see *De onderzoekers van de oorlog* (The Hague, 1989).

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day the news of Annie's departure had caused me to respond hysterically, I have never felt again the acute pain of her loss. It was as if her earlier existence had become a sealed-off part of my soul. Subsequent reading about the reactions of other survivors has made clear to me that my own was not unusual. By the time the information about Annie's death reached me, she would have been seventy-one years old had she still been alive—and my last memory of her is as a young woman of twenty-three. I was therefore not surprised at my own calm when the news reached me. After reading the letter, a copy of which I immediately sent to Tineke, I became silent and withdrawn for days on end remembering especially about my last talk with Annie. Once again I asked myself, as I had so often done during the past half century: Should I have insisted more emphatically that she must go into hiding?

Since the receipt of that letter, I have tried numerous times to imagine what it must have been like for them. In thought I have tried to walk with them to those gas chambers in *Lager* 3, holding Annie by the hand and talking softly to her. My powers of imagination fail me, however. For me, a survivor, the reality is too impossible.

I come next to how my parents managed to survive the war. I have before me two documents addressed to my father. The first, dated July 4, 1943, was signed by the secretary of the Portuguese-Israelitic parish in Amsterdam. It states that both my parents appear on the list, presented to the Portuguese government, of persons being considered for possible emigration to Portugal. It is a bit of a puzzle to me how my mother, who was Ashkenazi, made her appearance on that list.

The second document, dated July 10, 1943, and signed by an official of the JR, states: "It is with pleasure that we can inform you that the Department of Education of the municipality of Amsterdam has informed us that you will receive an *Ausnahmebescheinigung* (Certificate of Exemption)." I do not remember what that exemption meant. However, by September 1943 the deportation of Dutch Jews was virtually complete and already in July the situation had become extremely critical. I had continued to urge my parents by letter to go into hiding, informing them that Tineke had a place waiting for them. My

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sister's departure in late May had finally convinced them. In the summer of 1943 they went.

Their home was on a farm in the neighborhood of the village of Hillegom, near Haarlem. They now assumed new identities; I have their false IDs at hand. My father became Fredericus Leonardus Groenewege, born in The Hague, *Stucadoor*, white-washer, by profession. My mother was now Elisabeth Elerie, born in Usquert, in the province of Groningen. I also still have in my possession her *Stamkaart*, a document needed for obtaining new ration cards when the old ones had expired. By the strict rules of the game, I of course did not know where they were, except that it was somewhere outside the city. Knowledge of hiders' whereabouts could in fact be exceedingly dangerous. If someone did know, and that person was caught by the Germans, then the person hiding had at once to move elsewhere, since no one, however trustworthy, should be expected to remain silent under torture.

The following true story will illustrate that in those days knowledge could have mortal consequences. One day *lange Jan* (tall John), as he was known, was walking along an Amsterdam street. This man, whom I had once met, was an important figure in the resistance movement in our city. At one point on his walk he noted that he was being followed by two men whom he knew to belong to the Gestapo. He started to run. They started to run. *Lange Jan* ran into a house, up the stairs. The Gestapo men followed him inside. Jan climbed all the way to the roof, the other two still on his heels. Since he could not risk being captured, as he knew a lot, he took his own life by jumping off the roof. The ending of the story is even more bitter. Some time later it became known that the Gestapo people had not been after him, did in fact not know who he was, but had started pursuit after they saw him beginning to run.

All through the rest of the war, my mother walked freely outside; her appearance was not markedly Jewish. Since the farmer's family was Catholic, so was my mother, who passed for a cousin of the farmer's wife. She was supposed to be an evacuee from a region the Germans had requisitioned for military purposes. My father, on the other hand, had to stay

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hidden indoors during the day, but could come out on dark evenings, when he would walk around on the farmer's land.

My mother could therefore do her share of the shopping. She also regularly visited a village store where she could borrow books at a modest rate. This led to one of her more hilarious war experiences. One day she asked the store owner if he knew a certain book she had heard of. I do, the man said, but must warn you that this one is on the Catholic Index of forbidden books. In that case, my mother replied, I shall of course not take it along.

Reading became my parents' main diversion. In addition, I had undertaken to teach my father English. He and I each had a copy of the same textbook, which contained many exercises. My father would study a chapter and write out the assignments. These reached me by courier. I would check these and on the next occasion return them with corrections.

My father, an inveterate smoker, also developed the hobby of planting tobacco, which he would tend himself during evening hours. When the leaves were mature, they were brought inside and hung in the attic to dry. When that was done, my father had plenty for his pipe. I too got a share, finely cut, to roll cigarettes. These tasted awful, but it was the only tobacco I could lay my hands on.

Their life at the farm continued in peace and quiet until sometime in the spring of 1944, when German Army personnel came into their area to begin construction of launching sites for the V2 rockets which in September of that year began hitting London. It now became far too dangerous for people in hiding to stay in that area, since residences would most likely be thoroughly searched for hidden weapons and unauthorized persons. Once again, Tineke went into action, finding them this time a flat in the town of Heemstede. There they stayed safely till the end of the war. It was there that I saw them again for the first time after the war, having come on a borrowed bicycle.

By the time I went into hiding, it was already clear that Germany would lose the war, but nobody in his right mind could have foreseen how long our misery would last. The Germans had been driven out of Africa and out of Stalingrad.

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On a July evening in 1943, Pa Koehorst and I got seriously drunk celebrating the fall of Mussolini.

Soon after I had arrived on the Keizersgracht, a special place had been constructed where I could hide in case of a German raid on the house. In an attic next to my room, a wooden wall panel had been cut loose, behind which was a tiny space into which I could crawl if necessary. A lock had been attached to the panel's inside so that I myself could close off the wall once I was installed. I regularly trained myself to go rapidly through the necessary motions.

Life during the following months was a period of calm and routine. I had one wonderful diversion throughout that period. I have said that only Tineke knew where I was. This is not quite the whole story. One other person knew: Hans Kramers, the physics professor with whom I had become on increasingly good terms since my first visits to him in Leiden in the autumn of 1939. Ever since his university had been closed down by the occupying powers, he had been forced to seek income elsewhere. That is why he had become a consultant for the Bataafsche Petroleum Maatschappij, one of Holland's major corporations. This position brought him once a week to the company offices in Amsterdam. By contacting Tineke he had learned of my whereabouts. After consultation with my host, it was arranged that he would come and visit me once a week, on Mondays, after having finished his consultant's duties. He and the Koehorst family took to each other and Hans—as I now called Kramers—was invited to stay for dinner on the days he visited me.

Kramers and I would of course talk physics. In particular we had intense debates on questions having to do with the theory of the electron. Other subjects came up as well. Naturally we argued about the war situation. One day the discussion turned to music. Kramers said that my hiding period would be a good time for me to learn to play an instrument and offered to give me instruction on the cello, his own favorite. I said that sounded great, except that I had no cello. That was not a problem, he replied; he knew a music store in Amsterdam where one could be rented. Shortly thereafter Rob, the younger Koehorst son, was delegated to visit that store and rent an instrument. Now I had a wonderful new pastime. The noises

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I produced caused no problems. My hosts told neighbors in passing that Rob had taken up the study of the cello. And so my life went on, by no means unpleasantly, until one Monday in November 1943, when disaster struck.

It was about six o'clock in the evening. We were at dinner, Kramers included, when the bell rang. Whenever that happened, at an unusual hour like this, one of the Koehorst children would go down to open the door in person. This time it was the Gestapo. There was a special button near the front door which on being pressed sounded an alarm upstairs. When it rang, I ran from the table (someone at once took my plate away) to my hiding place. On my way upstairs I heard German spoken below, so I knew enough. I opened the panel in the attic wall and crept inside behind it. Then, dammit, I was so nervous that I could not work the inside lock. I therefore held the panel in position by hand. That way it did not fit perfectly; a narrow open crack remained.

The Gestapo people came upstairs and went into the attic. One man carried a strong torchlight which at one point he shone straight at my panel. I could see the light through the crack—I can still see that light even as I write these lines. He played the light around for a while. Then they left. For the moment at least, I had escaped the most dangerous situation in my entire life.

I kept on sitting in the tiny space, practically bent double, holding onto the panel. Then I heard the door to my room, across from my hiding place, open softly. Someone entered, I did not at first know who. Then that person sat down on a small bench that stood right at the wall behind which I was folded up. The person began to read, not loud but quite softly. It was Kramers. Earlier he had lent me a volume of Bradley's *Lectures on Shakespeare*. What this good man was doing now was reading to me from that book, in order to calm my nerves.

Sometime between ten and eleven one of the sons came to the attic to tell me that the coast was clear and I could come out. I vividly remember that I believed I had been cooped up for some fifteen minutes. In actual fact it was for four hours.

It was obvious that I had to leave the Koehorst home, but I could not depart at once. It was late at night now, and a person on the virtually deserted streets could attract too much atten-

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tion. So I rested, remaining fully dressed, until the next morning. Tineke and Marie had been alerted meanwhile. Shortly after eight I went by bike to their home.

Either that night or the next day (my memory is understandably hazy), the Gestapo ripped off the floor of Pa Koehorst's workshop downstairs. There they found hidden a quantity of fine ladies' fur coats and other valuables that well-to-do Jewish clients of Mr. K. had asked him to hide for them. As a result of that discovery, Pa was sent to prison, where he was kept for about a year.

After only a very brief stay in Tineke's home, I went to my next hiding place, an apartment on Admiraal de Ruÿterweg. I deeply regret having forgotten the names of my hosts. I now lived with a couple and their two daughters. The husband had an office job. The younger girl was about fourteen, the older about seventeen. It was a quite modest-sized flat in which, however, I had a small room to myself, all I needed.

It was a friendly family with whom I had very pleasant relations. A shadow hung over their life because the older daughter was epileptic. Her attacks were fairly frequent, at times several per week. It occasionally happened that I was all alone with her in the house when one of these attacks occurred. I had seen what one should do: Pillow under the head; place something between her teeth to prevent her from biting her tongue; hold on firmly to both arms; sit on the lower legs if necessary—all this to prevent the poor girl from hurting herself. When it was over, see to it that she rested quietly on top of her bed. I had a curious feeling of inadequacy, being unable to do more for her while she was in her epileptic state.

During my stay in my second hiding place, I continued my regime of physical exercise. I also listened to the BBC—including Churchill's occasional addresses—lying on my host's bed, a blanket over me and the small radio set. What I remember most particularly about that period is an enormous amount of reading. Tineke knew a man who lived nearby, who had quite a decent private library, and who had been kind enough to make a list of his books, at Tineke's request. That list was for me; I would select books, Tineke would fetch them for me. My recollection of what books I read in those days is poor. All I remember are wonderful hours with Tolstoi's *War and*

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Peace and with many of the writings of Dostoevsky. The library also contained a four-volume German edition of the complete plays of Ibsen. In one week I read all of them. In spite of all the ways I kept my mind occupied, I could of course not quite escape feelings of monotony. By way of mild diversion I decided to grow a moustache, just to look different. I nurtured this growth for a month or so, then shaved it off.

From that period dates one of the most important discoveries I ever made, and which forever changed my life. It concerned new insight into the process called thinking. Since my earlier years, at the University and especially in preparing my doctoral thesis, thinking had taken on ever-increasing importance in my life. In those years, I had to tell myself: Now sit down, young man, forget everything else and concentrate on your thoughts. Diversions could not only easily deflect me but would also cost time and effort afterward as I reverted to the thinking mode.

Now, in hiding, it all worked differently. I would get up, exercise, have breakfast, then sit down at my little worktable and presto, thoughts came totally unforced, by themselves, you might say. It was as if it was not I who did the thinking but as if thinking took place independently of my willing to think. It was, in other words, as if the self became the passive receptacle of thoughts that came independently of any doing by me. That was the most important positive experience of my years in hiding.

The influence of isolation on the creative thought process has been experienced frequently. Isolation is intimately related to the emergence of religious visions. It has been written that Moses wrote the words of the Covenant, the ten commandments, during his solitary stay of forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai, in the presence of only the Lord (Exodus 34:28). And that Jesus stayed in the wilderness for forty days (Mark 1:13). According to orthodox Buddhist belief, the Buddha Gotama remained in deep meditation under the Bo tree for seven times seven days and nights.

The most famous example of the positive influence of isolation on progress in science may well be the case of Isaac Newton, who in the 1660s was forced to live in seclusion on his mother's estate at Woolsthorpe for the larger part of two years, after the great plague closed Cambridge University. "That a

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youth should immediately after graduation retire to a lonely village and there, unaided, make three capital discoveries[17] in science, is nothing short of miraculous."[18]

One also finds the isolated state of the individual described in stories and novels. In several books by Charles Morgan, one finds a poignant term for the resulting state of grace: singleness of mind, in particular in *The Fountain*. Here the author describes the experiences of a British officer who, during World War I, spends a number of years interned in a small chateau in Holland. That novel, which I read for the first time in the 1950s and have reread several times since, has made a deep and lasting impression on me. I find it puzzling that Morgan's novels are now so little known. Those days of untrammelled thinking have taught me to appreciate quiet evenings spent later by myself at home.

My absorption in my own thinking led at one time to an embarrassment. Normally I had the freedom of walking around in the whole apartment. I was confined to my own room when my hosts had guests, and had to take off my shoes to minimize noise. That was the situation when, one day, deep in thought and oblivious to my surroundings, I stepped out of my room and, in stockinged feet, entered the living room where my hosts were having tea with a couple of visitors. Everyone in the room, including myself, was quite startled. My hosts simply had to explain the situation. Fortunately, their guests, very decent people, understood at once. Nor did my stupidity have any further consequences. Afterwards, I offered my apologies and pledged that never again would I cause similar embarrassment.

The sixth of June 1944 came, D-day. On the BBC a name was mentioned which I had never heard before: Eisenhower. I still have an old notebook filled with calculations with a marking in the margin of one page: D-day. All over Holland rules of curfew were tightened. That meant nothing to me, of course.

[17] These were the mathematical method of fluxions; the law of composition of light and the law of universal gravitation—not bad for a graduate student in his early twenties. It was during those Woolsthorpe years that, as alleged, he hit upon his fundamental idea of gravity after having seen an apple fall from a tree.

[18] L.T. More, *Isaac Newton* (New York, 1962), p. 41.

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In fact my focus on work, thinking and reading was not interrupted.

On July 20, a German attempt was made to assassinate Hitler while he was in his headquarters at the *Wolfsschanze* (Wolves' Entrenchment) in East Prussia. In the course of the day, the BBC broadcast the news which, however, was still quite vague. We kept the German radio going that day. Just after midnight, Hilter himself came on the air. In a curiously hoarse voice he told the world that a bomb had exploded two meters away from him, that he was unhurt, and that the criminal elements responsible would be destroyed without mercy. It was the last time I would hear that hated voice.

That event did not interrupt my concentration either.

Then came *Dolle Dinsdag* (Crazy Tuesday), September the fifth, 1944. Antwerp fell to the Allies. An erroneous Radio London report that the southern Dutch city of Breda had been freed led to an epidemic of rumors all over Holland suggesting that liberation was near at hand. Gone was my focus and singleness of mind, never to return for the remainder of the war. Like practically all Dutchmen, I was in a state of turmoil. At that time there was no doubt that Germany was well on its way to defeat. On that day it seemed as if we would be free within hours. Imagine my feelings. After having been cooped up for a year and a half, I would be free to walk the streets again! All of a sudden every additional minute of waiting became an agony.

Years later I was reminded of those explosive feelings when I read the account of slavery in the United States by Alexis de Tocqueville in his book *Democracy in America*. What de Tocqueville pointed out is that people can endure being enslaved for an unlimited time. When, however, they become aware of the possibility that this condition may not endure, their lives become all at once unbearable. This was exactly my experience on that Tuesday in September. But I had another very hard eight months to live through before it was all over.

Later that September I received an unexpected piece of news. My mother was coming to Amsterdam for a brief visit and hoped to see me. A meeting was arranged through the kindness of the Schönitzer family, friends of Tineke and Marie, who lived on the same street where I was hiding. My mother

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was to arrive there at an appointed hour. I was to join her there shortly afterward. (It was of course out of the question that she would come to the place where I was staying.) It was impressed on me that I must walk leisurely to that house, so as to avoid attracting attention.

And so, for the first time in I no longer remember how many months, I walked on a street. On arrival I thanked the hosts—whom I also knew—and embraced my mother, who looked well. We sat and talked for about an hour. Then she left. I was supposed to wait for a while longer before returning home.

Then the doorbell rang. The wife peeked out the window, looking scared, turned to me and said, "Quick, to the basement, there are two men at the door I have never seen before." It was the Gestapo. I ran into the basement, unprepared for the situation, looked around and saw a large vertical box of the kind used for storing clothes. I opened its lid, wormed myself inside, pulled some women's dresses over me and waited.

Minutes later the cellar door opened and the men came in. What I experienced next is unique in my life. I had the intense sensation of leaving my body and becoming a spectator of what was happening. The men puttered around in the cellar, never opening the box in which I was hiding, then left. I do not recall how long I stayed in the box, but after some time someone came down, called me, then told me I could come out. The coast was clear.

I went upstairs and had to sit down. My strange mental state had disappeared meanwhile, to be replaced by limpness and exhaustion. I was given a shot of brandy, waited a while longer, then returned to my own residence. No one ever found out what brought the Gestapo there at that time—minutes after my mother had gone. She too returned safely to her home.

Not long after, for reasons I cannot recall, I left the house on the de Rüyterweg, where I had spent nearly a year of my life in the company of good and kind people. I stayed next in the home of a psychiatrist and his family in the Lairessestraat. After a brief sojourn I moved again, this time to a house on the Herengracht.

That was an altogether different type of hiding place. The house was in the hands of the resistance movement. It was situated opposite Amsterdam's central telephone offices and

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was intended to serve as the basis for occupying that vital communications center when orders came. The basement of the house was a storage place for weapons to be used on that occasion. The inhabitants included a number of people in hiding like myself.

It was there that the hunger winter of 1944–45 hit all of us hard. It was cold; we often spent daytime hours huddled in blankets. It was dark—gas and electricity services had been suspended. Fortunately, the resistance people had provided us with a lot of candles, which enabled us to light one room. I have memories of our evenings together, cheery in spite of everything. It was a time during which I, like nearly all the Dutch, could think of only one thing: food. There was not much energy left for my beloved physics or for reading.

Early in 1945 I changed hiding places again—for the last time. Once again, the style was different. Together with three friends from my old Zionist days, I rented an apartment on the Hobbemakade in Amsterdam. The three were: Lion Nordheim, my admired friend from prewar days, the leader of the young radical Zionists, who on May 9, 1940, the evening before the German invasion of Holland, celebrated his engagement to Jeanne van Amerongen, whom he married later that year; Jeanne herself; and her youngest sister, Truusje. We had the apartment all to ourselves. Jeanne and Truusje went out freely on the streets. They had of course false identity documents and, blonde-haired and blue-eyed as they were, could easily pass for Gentiles. Lion, who had a very pronounced Jewish physiognomy, and I stayed indoors.

I should explain the layout of our domicile. First of all, the place was a trap; there was no possibility of hiding anywhere in case of unwelcome visits. We had a living room, kitchen, bath, and three bedrooms, one for Jeanne and Lion, one for Truusje, and one for me. It should be noted for what follows that there were no intimate relations between Truusje and myself.

The lifestyle differed from that of my earlier sanctuaries in that we had occasional friendly visitors. One of these was Bert Broer, a Gentile friend of mine from my undergraduate years in Amsterdam. He would turn up once in a while to discuss problems in physics. Another was a young Jewish woman whom

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I shall call Miriam. She had been engaged to a Gentile who was active in the resistance. They were both caught; her fiancé was executed. She had been in prison until a German official proposed that she become his mistress, to be installed in an Amsterdam apartment. She accepted and escaped soon afterward. Now she was at risk, but nonetheless went freely outside. (I seem to remember that she had dyed her hair blonde.)

Life was on the whole uneventful. I spent much of the daytime in my room with my physics calculations, which I copied in notebooks, and with my diverse reading. So it went on until one day in March, I believe it was the fifteenth.

That morning we had a visit from Miriam, who stayed for a while and then left. A bit later Johan van de Kieft came to see Lion and me. He was an important figure in the resistance movement, in contact with London. (Right after the war he became chairman of the socialist faction of the upper house of the Dutch parliament, and from 1952 to 1956 was Minister of Finance in the so-called third cabinet Drees.) The purpose of his visit was to discuss a draft bill, under consideration by the Dutch government-in-exile, which dealt with the fate of Jewish children who had been hidden during the war but whose parents had been deported and would probably not return. The issue was: who should be responsible for them after the war, the natural parents if they returned, the foster parents if they so desired, or the Jewish community at large? This complex and delicate problem had been discussed among resistance leaders since early 1944. On February 14, 1945, they had sent a proposal to London providing for the establishment of the *Voogdÿraad OPK* (Guardian Commission for Wartime Foster Children).

Van de Kieft wished to discuss the issue with us because we had been assigned (I do not remember by whom) to represent the Zionist youth movement with the resistance. That was my closest involvement with the resistance. I never participated in sabotage or use of arms. There were Jews who did so, however. One of them, Philip de Leeuw, was a friend of mine also from the prewar period. I was at his religious marriage in an Amsterdam synagogue early in the war, where he appeared in the uniform of a reserve first lieutenant. He was a brave man. In

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November 1944 he participated in an attack on a Dutch railway line, was caught, and was executed that same month.

After van de Kieft had departed, Lion and I talked things over and decided that a memorandum should be prepared for use by the resistance. Lion said he would write it, and started at once, while I repaired to my own room. Shortly afterward lunch was ready. As we sat down to our frugal meal, Lion put his unfinished writing in his jacket pocket—instead of storing it in a cache we had prepared for sensitive material.

After lunch Bert Broer came to see me. That day we discussed a paper recently published by the great German physicist Werner Heisenberg and a coworker, on the theory of superconductivity.

When the bell rang, I did not pay attention. Only the ladies were permitted to open the door. Moments later the door to my room opened. There stood a tall man in S.S. uniform, the skull and bones symbol on his cap, a drawn revolver in his hand. My first reaction was a quick look at the window. Could I jump out? Impossible. Not saying a word, the S.S. man moved his revolver to indicate that Bert and I should go to the hallway. The women and Lion were herded in there as well, rounded up by another German.

My strongest recollection of the next moments is the total collapse of Lion. I was of course frightened out of my wits, but that was as nothing compared to his behavior. He was visibly in total panic, had lost all semblance of composure, and moved erratically, causing one of the Germans to hit him in the face, sending his glasses flying. I heard Jeanne pleading with one of the men, offering diamonds to let us go, an offer that enraged them.

Next we were led down the stairs. Two cars were waiting. We three men were shoved in one, the women in the other. As we drove off, I experienced fears more intense than I have ever felt in my life. It was a degree of fear that caused physical pain. My body ached all over.

As I heard later, the women were driven to the women's prison. I did not see them again until May, when it was all over. We were taken to Gestapo headquarters (I believe it was on the Apollolaan), where the three of us were shoved into separate rooms.

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As I was waiting for what was to happen next, I remembered advice given me by resistance members on how to behave in such situations. First, and most important, try not to show fear. Behave politely. Ask for an interpreter who could translate spoken German into Dutch, the purpose being to gain time for replies. I actually never asked for that favor.

A man in mufti came in. I jumped to attention. As he paced slowly back and forth in the room, he began to interrogate me, speaking in conversational tones, never raising his voice. First he asked me if I was a Jew. I said no, I was not. Whereupon he ordered me to let down my pants. In Holland in those days circumcision was a procedure applied to Jews only. So I said, "All right, I am a Jew. But I am also a physicist, and all I did in that apartment was to pursue my researches, as you can verify from the papers and books in my room." The questioning went on, the man keeping up his slow pacing. At one point, when he came quite close to where I was standing he slapped me hard in the face, then continued his movements as if nothing had happened.

It was a shattering moment. The pain was only minor. But there was the shock effect of experiencing an abrupt and unexpected interruption of a basically conventional situation, two men talking, by an act of very brief but violent aggression. Its purpose was obvious: not so much to cause physical pain as to make me lose my mental equilibrium. Even though the man had succeeded in doing so, it did not interrupt the continuing interrogation, the questions now turning to my possible dealings with the resistance. I denied any such involvement.

The man left. I waited again. After a while I was ordered out of the room, whereupon I met Bert and Lion again, the latter looking ashen. Once again we were shoved into a car which brought us to the Weteringsschans, where we entered a building that before the war used to be the city's House of Detention but had since become a Gestapo prison. We three were pushed into a cell and the door was banged shut and locked. I had arrived in my next residence, cell IB4.

It would no longer have been possible to transport me to one of the camps in the East. On March 9 tanks of the U.S. 9th Armored Division had crossed the Rhine over a still intact bridge at Remagen, southeast of Bonn, near the Dutch border.

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On March 24 General Patton and his troops had occupied another bridgehead, at Oppenheim, and his tanks were already moving to Frankfurt. The night before, General Montgomery's armies had crossed the lower Rhine and were headed into the North German plain. *Festung* Holland was cut off.

When we arrived in our cell, another man was already there. He at once began to tell us of his capture earlier that day. When he had finished, he started the same story all over again. This went on for a while. It was not, you might say, an ideal ambiance for us who had just gone through the most wrenching experience of our lives. After a time, we simply told the chap to shut up, which, to our relief, he did.

We got nothing to eat that night; the first food we received came twenty-four hours later. When it came I was surprised to note that, in spite of a normally strong appetite, I had not noticed earlier the absence of anything to eat. The small cell contained four cots, a portable latrine, and a washbasin. I fell into an exhausted sleep that night, to be awakened by banging on the cell door, which then was opened. Like the others, I kept lying on my cot, awaiting developments. Moments later a prison guard came in and started yelling at us. Didn't we know that we had to get up on the double when the cell was opened, quickly get dressed, place the latrine outside the door, then stand at attention to await cell inspection? No, we didn't know, but of course learned quickly.

It had weighed heavily on my conscience that I had dragged Bert Broer into this predicament. It came as a relief when, two days later, a guard came in and told him that he was to be released forthwith. Bert was good enough to visit Tineke to tell her where we were.

The days took on a regular routine. Meals were miserably small. In the late mornings we were let out of our cell for airing and walked around for a short while with other prisoners in a small yard surrounded by high walls. It was beautiful spring weather. We could observe a triangular piece of pure blue sky through our small barred window. As I looked out one day, I saw a gull flying in my field of vision. I stood hypnotized, watching the gull glide effortlessly back and forth. What harmony, what freedom that single gull represented in my little

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patch of sky. Never have I had a more beautiful view of nature than was given me by that solitary bird.

Days in prison were mostly quiet, but nights were bad. We would hear heavy metal doors clanging, shouts, shrieks. We knew that some poor bastard was being taken away, but had only grim forebodings as to where. The monotony of the days was broken by periodic interrogations that took place inside the prison building. Sometimes Lion, sometimes I, was taken out of our cell. I was brought to a small room and remember one setting in particular.

As I came in, I saw a man sitting behind a desk, leaning back, relaxed, with hands clasped behind his neck. The room was otherwise bare, as was the desktop, except for a revolver lying in the middle. I stood in front of his desk, at attention as always. The man began to speak. "You will now tell me all you know about the resistance," he said calmly, "and you will speak the truth. If you do, it will help your situation considerably; if you don't, I shall shoot you right here in this room." My instincts told me: this is intimidation, stay calm, look the man in the eye, firmly but not aggressively. I remember how the thought came to me: he is the animal in this circus, you are the tamer; look at him in the way the animal trainer stares steadily at his beast. I replied to his question as I had done before: "I had nothing to do with the resistance. It is true that I am a Jew. But I am just a young scientist absorbed in my work, as can be seen from the papers found in my room. I am just a *weltfremd*, unworldly, young man." That worked.

Another day, when it was Lion's turn, he came back stumbling into our cell, quite pale and deeply shaken. "What has happened?" I asked. He said: "I have been condemned to death." My immediate reaction was and still is astounding to me. It was as if, inside my head, a blinding light shone and a voice spoke: I SHALL LIVE. I had not been condemned.

Lion had fallen on his cot. I picked him up and cradled him in my arms, as one does a young child. I spoke calming words to him; I do not recall what I said. Lion quieted down somewhat but remained deeply withdrawn and hard to reach during those next days, staring out of our little window, unseeing.

A few days later the cell door opened at an unusual hour. We jumped to attention. There stood the guard and next to him a

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man in S.S. uniform who, I later found out, was the prison commandant. The S.S. man looked us over, head to toe, one after the other. Then, silently, he pointed to me, indicating that I was to step out. Oh my God, I thought, now it is my turn.

Never saying a word, the commandant indicated that I was to follow him. We walked through a corridor, cells on both sides, until we came to a metal door. He opened it, I stepped through, he locked it behind me. Next a second door, same procedure. Then we came to an ordinary wooden door. He opened it, shoved me through, then said only: "*Fahrräder reparieren*" ("Repair bicycles"), and walked away.

I looked around me in amazement. I was in a good-sized hall; bicycles were standing along the wall. In the center about half a dozen men were at work on some of them. They were obviously prisoners since, like myself, they looked dishevelled and were unshaven. Two *Grüne Polizei* (Green Police)[19] were sitting at ease, rifles on their shoulders, smoking cigarettes.

I went up to one of the prisoners and asked what I should do. He said, "Talk to Jan, who is in charge," pointing to a tall, thin man who was busily occupied. I walked up to Jan and said, "I am supposed to work here but don't know from shit about bicycle repairs." Jan turned out to be an amiable fellow from the Jordaan (derived from the French *jardin*, garden), a workers' quarter in Amsterdam renowned for its special kind of slang and for the tough customers living there. Jan gave me some pointers and soon I was busy. I felt happy to have something to do and to have so much company. Some hours later I was brought back to my cell.

About happiness while in prison. From that period I have learned that even in times of misery there are good days and bad days. The next morning I was returned to the bike hall. It was then that I learned of Jan's brilliant idea of how to smuggle messages out. He had been put in charge because in real life he had his own bike shop. Every once in a while he would walk up to the guards and inform them that such and such a bike needed work that demanded special tools not available. But if someone would ride the bike to his shop and tell them that Jan

[19] German units, wearing green uniforms, whose task it was to maintain civil order in occupied territories.

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had said to repair the bike free of charge, then it would be taken care of. Meanwhile, messages were written on scraps of paper with a pencil stub someone had swiped. These were inserted between the inner and outer tube.

Some days later—we were now well into April—I found upon returning to the cell that Lion was gone. "Where is he?" I asked the man who had been with us from the beginning. He told me that two guards had come in and had ordered Lion to take his things along and come with them. He did not know anything more. I sat down on my cot, in despair. What else could I expect but the worst?

A day or so later the bike repair adventure came to an end when an S.S. officer marched in, walked up to Jan, smacked him over the head and told him that our courier service had been found out. Everyone was ordered back to his cell, and that was the end of that.

Another diversion came along shortly afterward. One day my cellmate and I were both ordered out of our cell and together with more prisoners were marched to the exit door. Outside stood a horse-drawn truck. All of us were ordered to get in, a tarpaulin was thrown over us, and off we went, ending up at a house somewhere in Amsterdam South. We got out, were ushered inside, and instructed in our tasks: there were cellars full of potatoes that had started to sprout. These had to be put in bags, carried up some stairs, then emptied into a courtyard. There we had to remove the runners, bag them again, and return them to the cellars.

I remember sitting outside, a pleasure in itself. It was a balmy spring evening. The fellow sitting next to me turned out to be Hermann Schey, a Jew and well-known basso, whom I had heard sing a number of times in the Concertgebouw. We were talking of music when suddenly another prisoner moved over and whispered that he had just heard bad news—President Roosevelt had died. It must have been about April 13 when we heard.

One last time I was taken out for a chore. A number of us were marched through Amsterdam to the port area, under guard by the *Grüne Polizei*. I engaged in an amiable chat with one of them, who was walking alongside me. Our job was to unload freight from a small German ship. In the course of the

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day the captain gave each of us a big slice of brown bread, saying, *"Wer arbeitet soll auch essen"* ("He who labors should also eat").

On May 13, 1988, friends and colleagues of mine organized a one-day symposium in honor of my seventieth birthday. In the evening a festive dinner had been arranged for well over one hundred guests. In the course of that event, a number of people spoke. None touched me more than Tineke. When she had finished, several guests were crying. My heart was full and my voice quavered as I spoke to thank her. From the text of her speech, combined with conversations we had in later years, the following picture emerges.

She had one funny story about me. One morning, while she was still in bed, the bell rang. "Who is there?" "Open up, police," a man said in Dutch. Tineke and Marie, her mother, were scared to death that this had to do with hiding Jews. The man came in and said he was from the morals squad. Complaints had been received that Tineke was visible in the nude as she was making her morning toilet. She solemnly promised never to do that again. I was there at the time and, curious as always, stood near a door to listen. The door had an opaque glass panel through which my silhouette was clearly visible. I removed myself when the man came near but was properly read the riot act afterward.

After the war Tineke and Marie drew up a list of people who at one time or another had been hidden in their home. Their count ran up to about one hundred names. I never knew more than maybe half a dozen of these, since, quite properly, the others' identities were not revealed to me. One I knew, Hans de Jong, a wealthy industrialist, had been betrayed by his bookkeeper. This led to a house search by the Gestapo, during which Tineke was thrown against a wall, headfirst. Marie was hiding elsewhere at that time. Tineke asked and was permitted to call her grandmother to tell her that she could not come for dinner that evening. The person answering said, with great presence of mind, "But you were not supposed to have dinner. Do you have visitors? Shall I call your mother?" "Yes," Tineke said. At that point the Gestapo man broke off the conversation.

The Gestapo left, but a week later Tineke and Marie were

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ordered to appear at their headquarters in The Hague for a long interrogation concerning Hans and to be instructed on how to recognize Jews and report them. They were shown photographs of eye shapes as true criteria of Jewish physiognomy. Then they were let go. Apparently the Gestapo had swallowed whatever Tineke had told them earlier.

Right after my three friends and I were captured, Tineke went to the house on the Hobbemakade where we had been living. When she rang the bell, the door was opened by a Gestapo agent. She was arrested on the spot, then interrogated at length. They had found men's socks and women's underwear in the same room and said that Lion must have been sleeping with Jeanne (whose story that she was Aryan had been believed by the Gestapo). So the tragic situation developed that the Germans believed that Lion, properly married to a Jewish woman, was considered guilty of *Rassenschande* (racial disgrace). This is why I earlier made the point that Truusje and I were not intimate.

That, I am sure, is why the Germans had it in for Lion rather than for me. There may well have been the following additional reasons. It was Lion rather than I who had in his pocket when we were caught the draft reply to the resistance about the Jewish war orphans. It was Lion who fell apart in the presence of the Gestapo who, animals as they were, could smell fear. Finally, it was he who looked so very Jewish.

After hours of interrogation, they let Tineke go with the warning that she would be watched, that she probably was Jewish herself or hid Jews, or had a Jewish husband.

At this point I should note that Kramers, advised by Tineke of my capture, had written (in German) to Heisenberg, probably stressing that I was a talented apolitical young physicist, or words to that effect. Kramers had sent a copy of the letter to Tineke. As he later told me, he did receive a reply. Heisenberg wrote back that he understood, was very sorry, but could do nothing.

It was Tineke who got me out. She had gotten hold of the name and address of a high Nazi official in Amsterdam and decided to call on him. She was received in his office. On his desk stood a photo of Goering, with a dedication *Für meinen Freund* (To my friend). Tineke was afraid that the man would

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ask for sexual favors, but was prepared to grant them if necessary. Fortunately, he did not. She showed him her copy of Kramers' letter to Heisenberg and asked for his help. After reading the letter, the man did not say a word to Tineke, but picked up the phone to call the Weteringsschans. "*Hast du ein Jude Pais dort?*" ("Do you have a Jew Pais there?") Yes, they did. "*Lass ihn gehen*" ("Let him go").

So it came about that I gained my freedom thanks to physics, the devotion of Kramers and, above all, Tineke.

On one of the last days of April I was taken out of my cell, IB4, and brought to the office of the prison commandant. He told me I was free but would at once be picked up and shot if I committed any act against Germany. I stepped out of his office and was brought to a small window near the exit, behind which sat a scribe who must, I knew, be a prisoner. He had to register my departure. I whispered to him, "Where is Lion?" He replied, also in a whisper, "He was shot several days ago." Then the small outer gate was opened. I stepped out on to the street. For me the war was over.

For maybe ten minutes I stood motionless in front of the prison on that sunny spring day. I felt no joy, I did not feel sad. I felt nothing. It is a state, called anhedonia by William James, in which one is incapable of experiencing emotions of any kind. In my case it was due to exhaustion, hunger (I never was thinner than at that time), feelings held back for too long to be readily reachable, and to the shock I had just had of the news of Lion's death.

Then I started walking, to Tineke's home—where else? No longer wearing a star, I went through the Leidsestraat, crossed the Koningsplein. When I rang the bell, there was pandemonium, laughing, crying. I was embraced by Tineke and by Marie, and hugged them both.

In the living room, there was a familiar sight. It was a wood-burning furnace, on top of which rested a tiny wood-burning stove with a big simmering pan of diced sugar beets. I was given a cup of the brownish, intensely sweet beet liquid and drank it. It tasted like ambrosia. I washed myself (with cold water, of course), then sat down. The first thing I had to tell them was about Lion. They already knew; when Tineke had

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gone to the German official to plead my case, she had also tried to help Lion and had been told of his execution.

Across the street from the house, there was a newspaper office with a barbershop on the ground floor. I said I would go there to be shaved. I went into the shop, told the barber that I had just come out of prison, and asked if I could have a shave. The man's response can only be called loving. He led me to the barber chair, made me sit down and said he still had one bar of shaving soap, which he only used on special occasions. Feeling ever so much more cheerful now that my dirty beard was gone, I got up and asked how much I owed him. This one is on the house, was the barber's reply. We warmly shook hands and I left.

I spent the next few weeks in Tineke and Marie's house. We no longer feared raids. I could come and go freely. First I had to catch up on the news; I was told that Allied troops had already penetrated *Festung* Holland. No Allied forces had yet reached Amsterdam.

Negotiations between the opposing powers had begun. As a result the Germans gave permission for Allied planes to fly over Holland in order to drop crates of food by parachute. This relief came none too early. By late April the food available per capita in the cities of Western Holland averaged 225 calories per day, which means a loaf of bread a week and two potatoes per day. Only later did we learn that on April 28 the last kilograms of potatoes were distributed. By May 5, the final slender reserve would have been gone.[20]

Sunday, the 29th of April, 1945, is an unforgettable day for all who were then living in Amsterdam. Everyone was on the rooftops, waiting for the planes to come. There they were, large, low-flying bombers. Everybody wept. By early May, 1,400 Flying Fortresses and 180 British Lancasters had dropped 1,200 tons of food in Western Holland.[21]

On the afternoon of April 30, Hitler took his own life. On May 7 German military leaders arrived in a little schoolhouse in Reims, France, where they signed the document of unconditional surrender of all German forces.

[20] *The New York Times*, July 23, 1945.
[21] *The New York Times*, May 6, 1945.

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On that same day Tineke and I left the house, intending to walk to the nearby Central Square, the Dam, which is flanked along one side by the Royal Palace, and which is the traditional gathering place for momentous events. We never got there. We had barely started on our way when shots rang out. Marie had opened a window and was yelling to us, "Come back, come back." As we were running back a man (whom we knew) fell, shot to death. What had happened was that drunken German marines, barricaded on and near the Dam, had opened fire with hidden machine guns.[22] Crossfire began as armed members of the underground fired back. We later heard that several people were killed on the Dam. So it came to pass that I saw my first war casualty after the war itself was over.

On May 8, V-E Day, Canadian tanks of the *Régiment de la Chaudière* entered Amsterdam. That midnight the guns of Europe fell silent. After twelve years, four months and eight days, the Third Reich had ceased to exist.

On September 12, 1988, I sent off a letter to the Director, Department of the Righteous, Yad Vashem. Part of the letter follows:

> The purpose of this letter is to propose a person as most worthy to be recognized by the Designation of the Righteous and to suggest that a tree be planted in her name at Yad Vashem. She is Tina Buchter Strobos, M.D. . . . I owe her my life. We have ties that will never break . . . It would be silly to make comparisons with other rescuers, of whom I have known several. But I have never known anyone with Tineke's moral nobility.

I have a copy of the letter, dated January 22, 1990, sent by the Director to Tineke. Part of it reads:

> I have the pleasure to inform you that the Special Commission for the Designation of the Righteous, at its session of November 28, 1989, decided to confer upon you and your mother Marie [who had died in the meantime] its highest expression of gratitude: the title of Righteous among the nations . . . Your name [will be] inserted in the Garden of the Righteous, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.

[22] *The New York Times*, May 10, 1945.

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THOMAS M. DISCH

The Cardinal Detoxes: A Play in One Act

> We are a sinful church. We are naked. Our anger, our pain, our anguish, our shame, are clear to the whole world.
> —The Most Reverend Alphonsus L. Penney, D.D., Archbishop of St. John's, Newfoundland, in his statement of resignation July 18, 1990

The scene is a monastically bare cell in a Catholic detox center run by the Brothers of the Most Holy Blood. There is a bed, a small night table beside it, a desk and chair, and a prie-dieu. On the wall above the bed, a crucifix, flanked by pictures of the Sacred Heart and Mater Dolorosa.

The Cardinal and a Brother of the Most Holy Blood are discovered as the lights come up. The Cardinal in a state of nerves; the Brother stands by the door, attentive but inexpressive, except at rare moments when the Cardinal has said something particularly offensive to conventional piety or pious convention. After any action he has been called to perform, the Brother returns to his post of duty before the door.

THE CARDINAL:

God. For the most part I do without
Him, Don't we all. He leaves us no choice,
Having left us, bereft us, at some point
In pre-history—say, at the moment Christ
Particularly complained of. Was that before
Or after the gall was proffered him? Say what?
Oh, yes, I know, it is your vow to say
Nothing at all. The merest sponge for all
My vinegar. And speaking of vinegar . . . ?

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The Brother nods, leaves the room a moment and returns with a bottle of white wine and a wineglass on a tray. He places this on the night table, fills the glass half-full, and gives it to the Cardinal, who takes a sip and makes a sour face.

THE CARDINAL:

Where do you find this wine? The tears of Christ,
Indeed! He would have died before he drank
This piss. But piss is sacred, too, if it
Is His, and I consume it reverently,
Having—had you supposed?—whispered the words,
The abracadabra, of consecration.
What priest, what Catholic, does not imagine
Every drop as somehow holy? Dregs
Of the wedding feast, lees of the Last Supper: this
Is my blood—
[*sips*]
—or soon enough will be.
It is kind of the Abbot to accommodate
My evening need to transubstantiate.
He doubtless sees it as the loosener of
My tongue. Is the recorder on? I know
I'm being bugged, but that's all one to me.
So long as you employ corkscrews and not
Thumbscrews, I will unfold my heresies
With all due pomp, a true heresiarch.
But the Abbot ought to know I'm not
The sort of heretic the Church is prone
To burn. In matters that concern the Faith
I am as orthodox as any pope.
The Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the fall
Of Adam and the fault of Eve,
The fleshly Resurrection of the Dead,
Whatever's set down in the Creed, or been
Decreed by any Vicar of the Church—
In all this I have Faith. What I believe's
Another thing. Belief's involuntary;
Faith's an act of will, more powerful
As it demands credence in what we can't

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Believe. Were I the Pope, I'd elevate
The Shroud of Turin to an article
Of faith; I would declare the round world flat
And build basilicas on Ararat.
So much for Faith; in morals, as well, I am
Ultra-montane. Priestly celibacy?
I agree. No contraception but
By abstinence. No sodomy. You look
Askance? Surely we must seal the back door,
If we lock up the front. Carnality will out,
No doubt, even among our holy few,
But all in cloistered silence, stealthily.
AIDS, alas, has made it hard to keep
Our sepulchres properly spotless. Even
Among you Brothers of the Holy Blood,
I hear, there have been actuarial
Anomalies. One abbot dead, another
Ailing, or so it's said. Well, there have been
Plagues before, and there'll be plagues again.
Please don't suppose I'm being holier
Than thou and thine. Would I be serving time
In detox if I hadn't erred as well?

He sits down on the bed and looks to the Brother for a glance of permission, then pours another glass of wine.

THE CARDINAL:

I *do* repent me of the woman's death:
Mother of four and pregnant with a fifth;
A Catholic to boot. Had I had doubts
Of God's ambition as a dramatist,
They'd be resolved with this: CARDINAL FLYNN,
INTOXICATED, REAR-ENDS PREGNANT MOM—
They're always "Moms" in newspapers—a Mom,
What's more, who was my own parishioner.
It is deplorable, and I deplore it.
Do I, as well, blame God? Who iced the road
And sent her Chevy somersaulting? No.
I doubt that God's as meddlesome as that.

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Newton's laws of motion did the job
Without His intervention. God, if He's
Not dead, is deaf, indifferent, or asleep.
For me, for most of us, God is a sham—
An ancient Poetry: I Am That I Am,
As who is not? I'm what I am, too—a priest,
A whited sepulchre, a drunken beast—
According to the *Times-Despatch* and *Sun*—
A criminal, though yet, with any luck,
The diocese will pay whatever price
The prosecution asks to drop the charge.
It wouldn't do, would it, to have My Grace
Be sent away, however many drinks
I may have had. Archbishops are not put
In jail. I wonder what they *will* have done
With me. You wouldn't know? Or wouldn't say.
Yours is the vow *I* ought to take—Silence!
But silence never was my forte. My forte
Is speech, and I will use it if I must.
I trust the tape recorder is still on?
Then this is what I mean to do, the same
As any minor mafioso caught
And facing time: I'll sing. I'll tell those things
We Cardinals and Archbishops say
Among ourselves, the secret wisdom of
The Church, its policies and strategems,
Beginning with the obvious. Just guess.

He pours more wine, savoring the Brother's baleful looks.

THE CARDINAL:

Abortion, naturally. It is the cause
To knit our ever fewer faithful few
By giving them an enemy to fight,
Those murderous liberal bitches who refuse
To be a Mom. It is the wolf who herds
The sheep; the shepherd but assists, and sheep
Know this. Wolfless, they'll stray beyond the reach
Of hook and crook. Just look at the mess we're in.

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No one attends Mass but the senile poor.
Detroit has simply given up the ghost
And closed its churches as the surest way
To staunch the flow of cash. Even where there
Is money, Faith's extinct—and Brotherhood,
The kind that's formed by cotes and ghetto walls.
Consider Poland, Northern Ireland,
Or *my* Archdiocese before this age
Of wishy-washy tolerance, when we
Were wops and micks and spics and krauts and built
The churches that stand empty now. The WASP
Majority was our oppressor then,
But now? Who hates us? Whom have we to fear?
Jews served the purpose for a while, and still
One meets the odd parishioner who feels
A pang of loss for Father Coughlin. Glemp,
In Poland, still baits Jews—the five or six
Surviving there. But after Auschwitz, how
Shall Holy Mother Church pursue that course?
The Jews, in any case, are not our problem:
Our problem's women. Ah-ha! Your eyes agree.
It's something every cleric understands.
It's what we mean by harping on the theme
Of family values and the sanctity
Of life, i.e., a way of bringing up
Men to be men, women to be slaves,
And priests to be their overseers. Think
Of Italy. For centuries the Church
Beneficently engineered the codes
Of gender so each Giacomo would have
His Jill, his family fiefdom, and his fill
Of sex, or if not quite his fill, his bare
Sufficiency, while she, the Mom, kept dumb
Or mumbled rosaries. Beyond the pale
Of family, the convent and the brothel
Took up the overflow of those who balked
At their Madonnament. The benefit
To all men of sufficient strength of mind
Should be self-evident; the rest could join
The Church, and practice harsh austerities

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Expressive of a holy impotence,
Or else become the system's managers.
Of course, it's not just Italy of which
I speak: it's you and me. It's Fatherhood
In all the Mother Church's Fatherlands.
And it's *women* who've rebelled, thrown off
The yoke of meek subservience becoming
Handmaids of the Lord Their Spouse, who would address
The Angel of Annunciation: "No,
I've better things to do just now than bear
A child. When I am ready, *I'll* tell you."
Women demand equality, and no one
Has been able to gainsay them. They have
The vote, the pill, the freedom of the street.
Now they'd be priests! They do not understand
When they have won their last demand, there'll be
No Church but just Detroit writ large. For why
Should men go on pretending they believe
In all our Bulls, if somehow they don't stand
To benefit? They will walk out the door.
Not all of them and all at once, of course.
Some unisex parents for a while will rear
Mini-families of one or two,
As now the wealthier Protestants do.
What's to be done? Redraw the line again?
Admit the ladies and admit the Church
Was wrong? Declare the Fathers of the Church
This age's Ptolemys, ruled out-of-date
By schoolmarm Galileos? Rather turn
Our churches into mosques! Islam, at least
Holds firm in keeping women in their place.
Within her chadhor, every Moslem Mom's
A nun, while *our* nuns change their habits for
A warrior garb of pants and pantyhose.
What we must do, what we have long discussed,
Is to relight the Inquisition's torch
For the instruction and delight of those
Who still can be relied on to attend
Autos-da-fé. Burn down the clinics of
Planned Parenthood. Make foetuscide a crime

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Punishable, like homicide, by death,
And if the civil power's craven courts
Should balk, if legislation's voted down
Or overthrown, then we must urge our flocks
To act upon their own. One simple, just
Expedient would be to institute
Homes where reluctant mothers might be brought
To term; initially, for Catholic girls
Whose parents can coerce such penitence,
As once defiant daughters might be placed
In convents; then, that precedent secure,
Encourage a clandestine brotherhood
To save those foetuses whose mothers may
Reject more mild persuasion. Civil crimes
Are justified—read any casuist—
When one is acting in a Higher Cause.
Not that such deeds would make states change their laws:
We would be martyred, made pariahs, sent
To jail—but what a triumph for the rights
Of foetuses, and what a way to weed
The Church's fields of tares. You think I jest:
So did the bishops gathered in St. Louis,
Though after the formalities, Malone
Of Boston and Passaic's Muggerone
Took me aside and asked to know if such
A league of fetal-rights revengers had
Been formed, assuring me that when it was,
They could supply recruits. Then Muggerone
Bewailed the evils of the media,
Who had exposed his till-then secret charity
In bailing out three youths who'd raped and stabbed
A cyclist in the park. The Bishop swears
He acted only in the interest
Of inter-racial harmony, a cause
That also prompted him to champion
St. Athanasius' Orphanage
For Children Born with AIDS, a charity
That has been universally acclaimed
Except by Bishop Muggerone's *bête noir*,
The *Jersey Star*, which claims the charges paid

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To the contracting firm of Muggerone
And Sons for laying the foundation of
The orphanage would have sufficed to build
A concrete pyramid upon the site.
It seems the Bishop's outlays for cement
Exceed the county's. He was furious.
"The media!" he roared—and you could see
His chins all in a tremble—"The media
Is killing us. It's Jews is what it is.
Jews hate Italians and control the news.
If you're Italian then you're in the mob.
There is no mob, the mob's a media myth!"
And all the while he fulminates and rants,
His limousine is waiting in the lot,
His chauffeur sinister as some Ton-ton
Macoute. What is so wonderful about
The Bishop is the man's unswerving and
Unnerving righteousness, his perfect Faith
That his shit and the shit of all his kin
Must smell like roses. God, what strength of mind!
Can you suppose that like aggressiveness
Would not more suit the present circumstance
Than to require this pusillanimity
Of me, those mewling statements to the press,
My sanctuary in a drying tank:
As well embroider double A's on alb,
Dalmatic, chasuble, and pallium.
Does Rome believe such sops will satisfy
The public's appetite for blood? I face
A statutory minimum of ten!
And what is being done? I must put by
My crozier, cease to preach from my own pulpit,
Surrender the archdiocese accounts,
As though I were another Muggerone,
Fold my hands and wait for sentencing!
I may not even speak in privacy
With my attorneys, but the legate's spy
Is crouching in the corner taking notes.
You keep me virtually a prisoner:
No telephone, no visitors, no mail

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That doesn't bear the Abbot's imprimatur.
And then you counsel me to fast and pray!
Well, I'll be damned if I'll be put away
As docilely as that. I'll bleat before
I bleed. You think *my* case is scandalous?
Wait till the papers get on yours, my boys!
I trust this is a live broadcast, and that
The Abbot's at his intercom—with whom
Else? Let me guess: Monsignor Mallachy;
My Deputy-Archbishop Sneed; and Rome's
Own damage control team, nameless to me.
If I'm not addressing empty air,
And if you'd like to hear the aria
Through to the end, I would appreciate
A dollop of some better lubricant.
I wait Your Graces' pleasure, and my own.

He finishes the last of the wine in the bottle on the tray, then goes to the prie-dieu, kneels, and folds his hands in prayer. The Brother regards him balefully; the Cardinal lowers his eyes. The Brother cocks his head, and presses his hand to his cowl, as though better to listen to earphones. With a look of disgruntlement, he nods and takes the tray with bottle and glass from the room.

Almost as soon as the Brother is out the door, the Cardinal gets the hiccoughs. He goes through various contortions trying to stop hiccoughing, sucking in his gut, holding his breath. He still has the hiccoughs when the Brother returns with a new bottle. The hiccoughs continue for a while even after his first careful sip of wine—each one being indicated by an asterisk within parentheses in the text he speaks: (*).

THE CARDINAL:

Hiccoughs always make me (*) think of Gene
Pacelli, Pius Twelfth, who died of them
And now is offered as a candidate
For sainthood. A saint who can't stop (*) hiccoughing!
As well a holy arsonist, a saint
With clap, a blessed ex(*)ecutioner.
The present Abbot's predecessor felt

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A special reverence for his (*) witheredness,
I understand, and entertained the hope
Of a mir(*)aculous remission. Yes?
It must be either Pius has no pull
With God, or sodomites can't win (*) his ear.
Imagine if his prayer'd been answered and
Instead of (*) what it is, a jail for drunks
In Roman collars, the Abbey here became
The (*) Lourdes of AIDS-infected clergymen.
I see them now, coming to hang ex (*) votos
At Pius's shrine. The statue's right hand holds
A model of a concentration camp;
The left, a water glass symbolic of
His (*) sufferings.

In the course of these blasphemies against Pius XII, the Brother has approached the Cardinal to refill his quickly emptying glass. His indignation finally is too much for him, and he slaps the Cardinal across the face, knocking off his glasses. Immediately, remorseful, he is on his knees to retrieve the glasses and return them to the Cardinal, who after his initial shock seems pleased to have made a dent in the Brother's composure.

THE CARDINAL:

I think I touched a nerve.
And you did, too: I've stopped the hiccoughing.
I wonder if you might have saved the Pope,
If you'd been there in 1958?
Now don't explode again: keep beating me,
I may seize up, or modify my tune
To something maddeningly bland, as: jazz,
And its potential for the liturgy,
Or else a homily on nuclear arms
And how the bishops must speak up for peace.
Oh, I have bromides in reserve that could
Sedate entire senates and have done so.
It's one of a bishop's most important jobs
To demonstrate to those who wield real power
The Church's ineffectuality

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In matters of much consequence. We scold
Bad boys if they make noise, but otherwise
We turn our eyes away. What if the Church
Were to attack the mafia, instead
Of sub-contracting with it, snuggling up
On St. Columbus Day, and saying Mass
At mobsters' funerals? You know as well
As I, the mafia would attack right back
As ruthlessly as any sovereign state.
Look at the drug lords of Colombia,
Where crime and law at last officially
Are one, the shotgun wedding of all time.
Do you think those drug lords don't intend
To decorate their polity with priests?
Their haciendas have not only taps
Of solid gold, but chapels, too, wherein
The Virgin Mother is particularly
Venerated, and with perfect piety.
For in all things relating to the heart
Criminals, poets, madmen, and lovers
Are more in touch with what they feel than we
Whose lives are ruled by prudence. I have been
Assured by Muggerone that Domenic,
His brother, is as staunchly orthodox
As Ratzinger in Rome—the same "Fat Nick"
Who holds the strings to half the rackets on
The Jersey docks. A scandal? Not at all.
Or not according to His Eminence,
Who takes a high, Dantean view of sin.
As, in the *Inferno*, lustful lovers
Are tumble-dried forever in gusts of flame,
Which *are* the lusts that sucked them down to hell,
So Muggerone insists that every crime
Is its own punishment, and prisons are
Superfluous, especially for the rich,
Whose very riches are more punitive,
In a Dantean sense, than time served in
The cloister of a penitentiary.
A lovely theory, is it not, because
Perfectly self-contained: whatever is

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Is right, even if it's wrong. Much more than I,
The Bishop's of a sanguine temperament,
Disposed to find in any seeming ill
The silvery linings of Our Savior's will.
In AIDS he sees a triple blessing: First,
As a plague selective of those most accurst;
And then in that it affords a lingering death,
Time for a true repentance to take root,
And for a good confession at the end;
And lastly, he rejoices in its horror,
Betokening the horror of lust itself,
Which violates the temple of the flesh
And now is seen to do so visibly
For the enlightenment of all who might
Be tempted to the sin of sodomy.
The bishop is no less inventive in
Finding a moral advantage in the plague,
So rampant in his own community,
Of drugs. Not only alcohol.

The Cardinal holds out his cup and as the Brother fills it, continues speaking.

THE CARDINAL:

We all,
Who celebrate the Mass, find comfort in
The wine that is our Savior's blood. But crack,
As well. In terms of moral theology,
Drugs are a bit of a conundrum—Cheers!—
Since nowhere in the older Tablets of
The Law are drugs, as such, proscribed. Indeed,
Good Catholics imbibed with not a twinge
Of guilt in Prohibition days, and what
Is alcohol if not a drug? This bottle's
Better, by the by. My compliments
To the cellarer. So, where were we?
Oh, yes: is heroin or ecstasy
Or crack *essentially* more wrong than, say,
A bottle of Chardonnay? Not logically:

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It is the use to which it's put. And that,
Among the younger felons of our age
Is to release a murderous rage, and rage
Is anger heightened exponentially,
And anger is, like lust, a deadly sin,
Whose deadliness the plague of AIDS reveals.
This can't be the official view of AIDS,
Of course; it wouldn't play well in the press.
Sufficient that we interdict the use
Of prophylactics; sin and nature can
Be counted on to do the rest. The Church
In this is like those foresters who let
A fire sweep unchecked through timberlands,
Then, when the ashes cool, move in to sow
The seedlings they have kept in readiness.
The Church's view is long as His who formed
The rivers, canyons, reefs, and limestone cliffs,
Taught bees, by trial and error, to mold their nests
In tidy hexagons, and teaches man,
As patiently, to follow Natural Law.
I've read somewhere there are historians
Who call the new age dawning on us now
Post-History, a pregnant phrase, and one
Suggestive of that Thousand Years of Peace
St. John foresaw in his Apocalypse.
If this is so, the Church must reassert
Its claim, based on its own long stability,
To be the stabilizer of the new
Homeostatic state, the *Pax vobiscum*
At the end of time. Oh my, this wine
Is mellower than the first. I hope I may
Interpret it as tender of a more
Merciful, accommodating view
Toward the disposition of my case.
The laurels of authorship as little tempt
Me as the palm of martyrdom, but if
I am thrown to the wolves and made to serve
That statutory minimum, I will
Write such a book the Vatican will wish
I'd never sat at her consistories,

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Had not been privy to the audits of
The Banco Ambrosiano, nor been sent
On secret missions to the President.
Oh, I have tales to tell, and they exist
Not only in my mortal memory
But in a still unpolished form in vaults
To which my legal counsel has the key—
In the event of my untimely death
They will be published in their present form,
And I assure you, there'll be such a storm
As has not rocked the Church's holy boat
Since presses multiplied what Luther wrote
Like basketfuls of poisoned loaves and fish.
Such cannot be the Hierarchy's wish.
These are my terms: I must retain my See,
My freedom and my Cardinality.
As to the means, ask Bishop Muggerone
What judges currently are selling for.
Now, if you please, I'd like to use a phone.

The Cardinal comes to stand directly in front of the Brother, who moves away from the door. The Cardinal tries the door and finds it locked. He stands for a while, resting his forehead against the locked door, defeated—and unaware that the Brother, after receiving another message through his earphones, employs this moment of inattention to introduce poison into the opened bottle of wine.

THE CARDINAL:

I see. It is a kind of miracle
When those who have been blind are made to see.
Attorneys can be bought for half the cost
Of the judiciary. Muggerone
Would have known that. My aide-memoire
Can't help me now, if it is where I think.
(faces round, smiling)
Well, then, let me drown myself in drink.

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The Brother pours a full glass of the poisoned wine, which the Cardinal accepts after a moment of hesitation. As at his first taste of the earlier bottle, he makes a sour face.

THE CARDINAL:

Between the first glass and this next, the wine
Would seem to have turned sour. Would you agree?
Ah, I forget—you're sworn to abstinence.
My tongue should have been wise as yours. And mute.

He tosses back all the wine in the glass and holds it out to be refilled. The last of the wine is poured in the glass.

THE CARDINAL:

A toast: to my successful autopsy
And to the holy and redeeming blood
Of Christ. May it provide the evidence
To hang the lot of you! In youth I prayed
I might become a martyr for the Faith.
God has too long a memory, too cruel
A wit—which makes Him, come to think of it,
A God that I deserve, and vice versa.

He flinches with the first effect of the poison. The Brother helps him to sit on the edge of the bed. He begins, again, to hiccough, and makes a desperate effort to stop.

THE CARDINAL:

Water, damn you! Get me a glass of (*)

The Brother takes the wineglass, goes to the door, unlocks it, leaves the room, and returns with the glass full of water. The Cardinal, who is doubled with cramps, and hiccoughing, closes his eyes, holds his breath, growing red in the face and takes twenty sips of water. To no avail. The hiccoughing persists. The Cardinal smashes the glass on the floor. He pulls himself to his feet by clawing at the Brother's habit.

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THE CARDINAL:

Cure me! You did before, you (*) must again:
I will not die like that damned (*) wop!

The Brother strikes him across the face, knocking off his glasses, but the blow has no effect against the hiccoughs.

THE CARDINAL:

Again!

The Brother uses all his force. The Cardinal falls back across the bed. His face is bloody. His hiccoughs are gone. He is dead. The Brother kneels at the foot of the bed and makes the sign of the cross.

Curtain

Afternote

In spring of 1987 I began to review theater for *The Nation*, and not long after that, emboldened by both a sense of the sheer, room-for-one-more size of the entertainment industry and by what seemed to me a heartening shortage of good writing, I tried my hand as a playwright. First, at the invitation of Jeffrey Cohen, who headed the RAPP Theater on Manhattan's Lower East Side, I wrote an adaptation, in four acts (though with only one intermission), of General Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur*. In my version Wallace acts as a Wilderesque Stage Manager and doubles in some of the roles, so that the original melodrama, while remaining intact, is interleaved with material relating to Wallace's Civil War career and to later Roman/American imperial parallels. RAPP premiered *Ben Hur* in Baltimore in the early summer of 1989, and not long afterward, dazzled by having seen *Ben Hur* with its sets and costumes and original musical score and a cast of over twenty, I began to write

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a play that would be all my own—not an adaptation—*The Vampires, A Comedy in Two Acts*—and halfway through *that* play, around Labor Day, I was interrupted by another brainstorm, and in a ten-day marathon, sequestered in a cottage in the Poconos, I wrote *The Cardinal Detoxes*.

I doubt it would have been written without the confidence imparted by *Ben Hur* and the momentum achieved in *The Vampires*, for in terms of practical producibility *The Cardinal Detoxes* would seem a pretty quixotic venture—a thirty-five-minute monologue in blank verse designed to serve as a vehicle for my hoard of opinions concerning the secret, *Realpolitik* reasons for the Catholic Church's more opprobrious policies and scandalous behavior. Like so many other fervent ex-Catholics, the Church's misdeeds were my hobbyhorse, but I'd never *ridden* that hobbyhorse for any distance. However, I did already have the "voice" of the play's protagonist, who'd first appeared as a Machiavellian Cardinal in four short poetic monologues. When the idea came to me for the play's dramatic premise, which gives the Cardinal a compelling reason to take inventory of the Church's entire can of worms, the work went wonderfully smoothly. No doubt I was helped by my conviction that this would be a closet drama, unlikely to be published, certain never to be performed.

With an impresario's instinct for scandal, Jeffrey Cohen decided to pair *The Cardinal Detoxes* with an even shorter *grand guignol* curtain-raiser I'd written some time before, *The Audition*, and to perform that on RAPP's smaller stage. Cohen had the perfect Cardinal ready to hand in the person of George McGrath, a RAPP veteran, who had taken the role of Lew Wallace in *Ben Hur*. Some nine months after it was written, on May 23, 1990, the show opened at RAPP's home in a former parochial school building on East 4th Street.

Ultimately it was to be the play's venue, more than its contents, that would make it the focus of controversy. In its initial three-week run, the Church hurled no thunderbolts at *The Cardinal Detoxes*, placing its trust, prudently, in the normal mortality rate of Off-Off-Broadway productions. The play got a good amount of critical attention but not the make-or-break authentication of notice by the *New York Times*. *Theater Week*, however, concluded a rave review with the suggestion that the

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play might serve as "an ideal midnight show that just might be *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* of off-off-Broadway," and in September Jeffrey Cohen decided to revive the play (without *The Audition*) as per *Theater Week*'s suggestion, for an open-ended run. Before performances could resume RAPP received a letter from the lawyers of its landlord, The Most Holy Redeemer Church, demanding that RAPP terminate all performances of the play, because it contained "language . . . which would be detrimental to Landlord's reputation as a Roman Catholic Church." If the play went on, RAPP would be evicted, along with the more than thirty theater groups, artists, and social service organizations that sublet space in the former school building from RAPP.

On September 20, 1990, the Church's threat made headlines in the *New York Times*, the *Post*, and *Newsday* with Cardinal O'Connor's press agent, Joseph Zwilling, putting the Church's case. "This [play] is detrimental to the Catholic Church. Even though it is rented by an outside group, we still have to run it in keeping with Church teachings. We include a clause in the lease to insure that."

When RAPP went to court to fight the eviction, media attention warmed up. The *Post*, where O'Connor's least sneeze is accorded front-page attention, ran an editorial on September 23, entitled "The Church Fights Back," congratulating the archdiocese on "its principled stand" and concluding that "the priests and lay members of the church should know that New Yorkers of all faiths admire the manner in which they've conducted themselves."

In the next month I used up most of my allotted fifteen minutes of fame, as my first-ever soundbite was aired on WINS All-News radio, and on Channels 5 and 2, and in the *Post*. "The Church has always been in the habit of trying to smash unflattering mirrors. If you write anything about the Church that's not a vehicle for Bing Crosby they go ape." I also had the pleasure of publishing an open letter to Cardinal O'Connor in the October 15 issue of *The Nation*. With more time than is allowed in a soundbite, I posed the rhetorical question: "When criticism is based upon matters of public record, scandal and notoriety (and all the fictive scandals referred to in my play have clear parallels in news reports of the past few years), can

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the *critic* be blamed for damaging the Church's reputation?" I went on, "The themes *The Cardinal Detoxes* does treat—the *Realpolitik* behind the Church's positions on abortion, AIDS education, shrinking parishes, diminishing vocations, women's aspirations for the priesthood, and the hierarchy's ingrained hypocrisy—are the regular concern of most articulate, liberal Catholics (they do exist, though increasingly they are leaving the Church—or being evicted). Witness almost any issue of *National Catholic Reporter*, the nation's foremost independent Catholic journal. Yet what is common knowledge in the pages of the *Reporter* has been decreed forbidden fruit on the stage of RAPP."

The story hit the papers again on October 5, when Irma Santaella of the State Supreme Court ruled in the Church's favor, at which point enough media energy had been generated that the celebrity attorney William Kunstler took up RAPP's cause, and he, Jeffrey Cohen, and I were taken to New Jersey to appear on a daytime talk show hosted by Curtis Sliwa, of Guardian Angel fame, who, in lieu of an official spokesman, undertook to argue the Church's case—and did so rather more ably than Zwilling.

Later in October there was a final spate of headlines when the Church, balked of the gratification of an immediate closing of the play because of the appeals process, apparently summoned a goon squad from the City's Department of Buildings, who tried to close the theater by force, provoking a near-riot. As reported in the *Times*, a Department of Buildings spokesman said its action was coincidental and caused by clerical [*sic*] error: "There absolutely was no intervention by the archdiocese." Kunstler expressed a contrary opinion, to which Zwilling retorted with his reflexive response to any criticism: "Ridiculous."

In the end the Church carried the day by its traditional means—inertia and patience. The controversy lost steam, the case dragged on in court, audiences dwindled, and the *coup de grâce* came not at the hands of the Church but by the provisions of Actors Equity, which requires any production that runs beyond a certain length of time to up salaries and hire more personnel. RAPP vacated the premises and ceased to exist. Jeffrey Cohen moved to the West Coast, where he recently directed a well-received *As You Like It*. I am now writing a novel,

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The Priest: A Gothic Romance, which has served as a more than sufficient safety valve for any residue of anger from the experience. Indeed, I must admit that, having been spared direct physical confrontation (unlike Cohen, who told me he had been roughed up by "workmen" trying to close down the theater), I found the whole thing pretty exhilarating.

When things had calmed down I often wondered *why* such a fuss was made about a half-hour-long verse drama playing at the far reaches of Off-Off-Broadway. Why did the Church *bother*? I have two theories. The paranoid theory is that the Church hoped to set a precedent with this case that would allow it to exert its power as a landlord in sinister new ways. If RAPP could have its First Amendment rights abrogated by a clause in a rental lease, might not other clauses be inserted in other leases to (for instance) bar pharmacies from selling contraceptives—or even to allow the Church as a residential landlord to evict any tenant who has had an abortion?

Actually I don't really think the tide is running that way. I think that what happened with *The Cardinal Detoxes* was simply a testimony to the primal power of live theater, which can generate public controversy out of all proportion to the size of its audiences. When the Church acted to shut down my play, I doubt that it had been seen at that point by as many as a thousand people. But the Church, with dinosaur-like intuition, understands that the transaction between players and audience is essentially the same as that between priest and worshippers. Basically we're in competition for the same souls, as our Puritan forefathers realized when they targeted the theaters of their time. In the crucial political act of forming and controlling the moral imagination they would brook no rivals. The Puritans lost that round. I think the Church is losing this one.

—T.M.D.

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ROBERT SCHULTZ

The Madhouse Nudes

John Ordway
503 Lime Bluffs Road
Delphi, Iowa

June 16, 1990

Wyatt Arends
261 West 10th Street
New York, NY

Dear Wyatt,

Well, I'm back, though it wasn't easy. My flight out was cancelled because the plane was broken, and it looked like I was going to be all day zigzagging home on other flights. But I ran with a bag in each hand from one end of the terminal to the other and caught a plane with another airline. Stepped on just before they rolled back the jetway and was still breathing hard when the stewardesses handed out the little foilpacks of peanuts. On the connecting flight out of Milwaukee in a small twin-engine plane we bobbed on the drafts between thunderheads. Jamie was at LaCrosse with the van to pick me up and we drove through rain and lightning across the steel bridge at Lansing and all the way to Delphi. Who says there's no adventure left in travel? Of course, if I'd been going to L.A. or Paris it would have been simple, but to penetrate to the remote heart of North America is another matter.

Though I was only away two weeks, the apartment feels strange and the studio seems bigger. I'm at the studio now, sitting at the table under the north window, watching the crows sway in the top of a pine across the road. Behind me, the place seems empty, now that you have the canvases that had been leaning against the walls. The hardwood floor down to the big

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windows feels like a dance hall. The humidity is almost tropical today and the red bricks of the walls are sweating.

I have a model coming over in a few minutes. I want to do some studies for a series of big nudes. The small ones I left with you are half measures. I've just decided. Since getting home I've been stuck on what that woman said at the party the last night (what was her name? she writes for one of the papers). When she leaned toward me her condescension was masterful, or was that pity for the visiting provincial? "But the nude is simply unavailable," she said. "Especially the female nude. Even the women should leave it alone for thirty or forty years." Well, that sounds like an opportunity to me. Whenever something is declared dead, I circle in.

I said the apartment feels strange. Jamie had painted the front room a kind of adobe orange (she said we need warm colors for the long winters), but that wasn't it. I think it was just that sense of the uncanny you feel when you return to the familiar, a ripple of displacement at seeing home as a new place to come to. Does it happen to you when you've been away? It reminds me of how much work it is to stay awake in your life. That first night back in my own bed, lying behind Jamie with my arms around her, she felt both like herself and someone new. In the dark our bed was a pool with no bottom.

I think I hear my model coming up the stairs. It was fine to spend a few days with you and Alice, to make the rounds of the museums and galleries, and to visit some of the old spots.

Thanks,
John

John Ordway
503 Lime Bluffs Road
Delphi, Iowa

July 3, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

Good to hear about the sale. You worked quickly. Thanks. Yes, I had thought of the nude by the yellow table as companion to the one with dark blue trees through the window—

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morning and evening pictures. Maybe your client will eventually want the yellow, now that he has the blue, but don't worry about splitting them up. Again, thanks. Jamie will be glad to hear the news when she gets back. She's selling some of her things at a fair in St. Paul and will drive home in two days.

It's late and I've been reading in the front room. The lamplight on the adobe-colored walls is restful, even in summer. I worked all day and am tired. I'm working with two new models, sometimes in the same day: today Ellen in the morning and Jean early evening. Ellen is sunny but self-conscious. In a way she's the archetypal young woman of these parts: very fair-skinned but with high color in her cheeks, hair so blond it's almost white. She's tall, lean, but strong in the shoulders and thighs in a way that goes with her rather square jaw. But for all her appearance of physical vigor and strength, she seems ill at ease with her body. I have to pose her and she holds a pose with difficulty and gets tired. So I paint the tension. She works at the public library afternoons and some evenings. She's single and moved back here—her home—after college four years ago. She's trying to save money, though she doesn't yet know what for. She said she answered my ad because it sounded like a way to earn money with hours that would fit around her library job. I think she also came around because to pose seemed like something from another world, one she's wondering about entering when or if she leaves home again. Anyway, that's where I imagine the tension comes from: posing a few hours a week puts her, in her mind, across a border she hasn't yet decided to cross.

Jean, on the other hand, comes in, drops her clothes, and lounges on the platform as if she's leaning back into a warm bath. I never pose her; her instinctive physical comfort, even grace, is feline. She's about 30 and has long straight brown hair and tanned skin. She's married to a man who works in a small local factory, she's a cashier at a store downtown, and the two of them go to the bars most evenings. She usually takes her hours here after work and seems to relax, as if slipping into her natural element.

Sometimes all my years of painting—the hours in figure studio at art school with the tired, bored models; the last years in New York when the sense of the "business" of art was so

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wearying—sometimes they all fall away and I'm struck by the strangeness of waiting in an upstairs room for a woman I know slightly, if at all, who arrives, undresses, poses before me for two or three hours, then dresses and leaves. Here, in a small Midwestern town, with models who are doing this work for the first time, a sense of the nonconformist—even the illicit—hangs in the air. We are wrenched into a strange intimacy, though we take pains not to acknowledge it. And so the subject of the pictures, as when I began, is the fact of nakedness. I feel like I'm starting over, having recovered the first things.

John

John Ordway
503 Lime Bluffs Road
Delphi, Iowa

July 4, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

I know I just wrote yesterday, but there's nothing to do today. Jamie's still in St. Paul and I can't get a model on a holiday. It's too hot to do anything, anyway. It's ninety degrees and humid. I'm sitting in the bright kitchen and idling over a bottle of beer. The corn in the fields just outside town is knee high and higher. On days like these I really do think you can hear it grow, the leaves reaching out and bending over with a little snap. We had a cool spring and early summer, so I'm not used to the heat. My head feels thick and my arms and legs heavy. I think the best I can do is sit here in front of the fan and write this letter.

Today is an anniversary, of sorts. Last year we moved to town, arriving in our rented truck a little after dawn. We finished moving our things into the apartment that afternoon and, because it was hot inside, wandered up to the city park on a bluff overlooking the river. We spread out a blanket and fell asleep under the big oaks. We woke as townspeople gathered for an Independence Day celebration, carrying their own blankets and lawn chairs and arranging themselves around the elevated, gazebo-style bandstand. Soon popcorn and ice cream cones were being sold to the children, the mayor recounted the

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town's ethnic history and welcomed visitors from abroad, a congressman talked about the U.S. Constitution, and the municipal band played marches and patriotic songs. We felt as though we had moved not only 1,000 miles west but also 40 years into the past. We sat up on the blanket, still exhausted, but stunned into tranquility by the clarinets and flutes and by the calm civility of the ritual. By now we recognize the element of willed innocence and self-conscious nostalgia in these ceremonial occasions, but I'm not tempted to irony when I describe them. There's enough truth to sustain the moment, however fragile.

I'm still pleased by the coincidence that we arrived on the day Thoreau went to the woods. A sense of economy something like his brought us here. The rents on the apartment and studio are low; we've been lucky with our health so far, so have gotten by all right without insurance; we don't eat in restaurants and our "entertainments" are cheap. We can almost live on Jamie's pots and weaving, and when I sell a dozen paintings in a year we feel flush. We have tried to live simply and directly, to be able to survive by the work we most want to do, rather than do something else to buy time for our best hours.

Last year in St. Paul Jamie sold all the weavings she took, several pots (including two of the tall ones), and she picked up two commissions. We lived for two-and-a-half months off that show. She's good. In the summer, with the regional fairs and festivals, she's on the road quite a bit. I go along sometimes, but my paintings don't sell at those places so I'm better off staying home and working.

But I'm worthless in this heat. I find myself sitting and staring for minutes at a time. The sun is pouring through the window onto the blue and white checked tablecloth. In the middle of the table, in a steel bowl, are red and green grapes, spotted bananas, ripe peaches. The scent of the peaches is strong in the humid air. My life seems to spread out in rings from the steel bowl of fruit. I think of my sketches in the studio five blocks away, my neighbors gathering across town in the park, Jamie tending her booth in St. Paul, you and Alice in New York. A line moves out from the center through the rings, and all I want to do is to show you all how the light in July on a ripened peach is more solid than my own body around me.

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We're not supposed to paint bowls of fruit these days. But if I could do *this* bowl, *this* peach . . . The aim is that we see for a moment with the same gaze. All art that I care for is about intimacy. I have looked at one of Jamie's undecorated jars and seen the poise we both long for but seldom feel. We bump through our lives together, anxious, hopeful, sad—it changes by the hour—and suddenly there it is. The slender form is waist high, rising from the floor, widening as it goes—a stretched amphora. There is a coolness in it, and a delicate certainty. In that moment I know her better than I have for weeks.

Well, even without a model, perhaps I can work this evening when it is cooler.

John

John Ordway
503 Lime Bluffs Road
Delphi, Iowa

July 9, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

Hot and bright today, less humid. Very clear. I can look out the studio's north window, over the rooftops and past the big pines, to the ridge at the far side of town. Jamie did very well in the Twin Cities, was back just long enough to glaze and fire some pots, and now is at a show in Milwaukee. So I've had a lot of time to myself. Now it's early evening after a full day working with Ellen this morning and Jean late afternoon. I'm doing sketches one after another as quickly as I can, shaking out ideas for the next paintings. If there were more light, I'd go for a walk and sketch in one of the parks. I'm interested by the possibility of setting my figures in natural places—without pastoral absurdities. It feels very different to be drawing nudes here, different from working with the body in New York. Jamie quipped the other day that I'm either going to be on the cutting edge, discovering the true feminist-ecological nude, or earn the world's scorn by yet again equating men with culture and women with nature. We joke sometimes—a little nervously, I

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think—about trends, movements, orthodoxies. I guess it's our way of holding them at arm's length.

I like working on two tracks with two different models. In the studio's hard mid-morning light Ellen seems bright to the point of overexposure. Her skin and hair are brilliant. The frankness of that light, combined with her self-consciousness, is very poignant. I'd like to be able to capture the almost physical sense of vibration she communicates. The subject that comes to mind when I work with her is repression and the effort to work free from it. Her presence on the platform seems an extraordinary act of will, a difficult performance. Really, it's a little brutal—I think she sometimes feels quite nervous—but I assume she answered my ad for her own reasons and it is my work to find the truth in the figure she presents, if I can.

On the other hand, it's hard for me to concentrate on Jean as an individual. My imagination keeps slipping away from her to archetypes or myths. She's utterly unself-conscious. Since I'm doing a lot of sketches, I tell her to move around as she wants to, and so she holds a position for about ten minutes and then rolls over or crosses her legs or moves to a chair. She luxuriates in the studio as if it's a lazy Saturday at home with a magazine, and yet she is instinctively graceful and attractive. Her nonchalance gives her sensuality an air of command. A couple of times I've asked her to bring an object along that she'd like me to include in my sketches of her. The first time she brought a shallow dish filled with the small blossoms of a local rose. Another time she brought something she'd gotten on a vacation—a big white conch, fluted at its lip, and pink inside. Well, you get the idea. When she's in the room, everything's a symbol. It's been a long time since a model has made me feel self-conscious about the pencil in my hand.

Downstairs the landlady Mrs. Tolman is frying onions. They smell wonderful and are making me very hungry. I'd better go home and fix some supper. When Jamie's not here I lose track of time. The sun's gone down and a couple of thin high clouds over the western ridge are lighting up like neon tubes. Sometimes it's a good life.

John

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John Ordway
503 Lime Bluffs Road
Delphi, Iowa

July 13, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

Something's happened. I was at the studio yesterday when Jamie got home from Milwaukee. I walked into the house and she was sitting on the little couch in the front room. When she looked up I knew there was something wrong. She said, "I've got to go away for a while. Things just aren't working out here the way we had hoped." She said, "There's a current in New York that carries you along, or that you navigate in or against, but it's all still water here. There's nothing to keep you moving or to push off from." She was talking about her work, but I felt she meant everything else, too.

I was just standing there across the room, completely stopped. After a minute I asked, "Are you moving away from this place or from me?" She looked away, out the window. After a minute she said, "It's been a lot of work, lately. I don't know. I can't sort it all out."

She collected most of her things and went up to Minneapolis that night. She said she's thinking about moving back to New York, but has found a place in the Twin Cities for a while until she decides.

That was two days ago. I'm still numb with surprise, and in the quiet house I find myself re-reading the past weeks and months. I hadn't understood anything correctly. Jamie had been quiet for stretches this spring and summer, and I had taken it for preoccupation with her work. She's been remarkably productive and that made me glad. I had been busy, too. I thought we were settling into the kind of routine we had hoped for when we left New York. Now I think her silence was the distance building as she gradually pulled away.

I'm unhappy—I'm miserable—but I'm not angry. I don't blame Jamie. I can see things her way, now that she's pointed it out to me. There's a heave to get started every morning. It's all up to us. There's not a sense that the kind of work we're doing is in the air. There aren't other artists, galleries, critics, and

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buyers around to assure us that our work is important. In fact, when I step outside the apartment or the studio, my painting seems the oddest thing around. I see now that Jamie and I were thrown back upon each other in a way we hadn't been before. She had to be my prop and mirror, and I had to be hers. It *was* a lot of work.

But for me—and I thought for her—there were compensations. Most days I'm glad to be out of the clamor of the "profession." We've both felt lonely, have missed our friends, but I haven't missed the desperation and ambition, everyone calculating their prospects and plotting their next move. I got sick of trying to be the boutonniere on the world's lapel.

But I've know all along there's a kind of ambition which is a good, clean thing—the attempt to see a thing and feel it as fully as you can, and to get it down. It's like telling the truth, and I thought we could do it here. Maybe we still can. Maybe I can. I don't know what's going to happen.

John

John Ordway
503 Lime Bluffs Road
Delphi, Iowa

July 18, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

I've been trying to work this week, doing studies with Ellen for a big canvas. As always, technical matters are most immediate, breaking the pose down to bone and muscle, the charcoal stub rebuilding the body in line and value. Then, since it is a study, a detached part of mind is considering the possibilities for the composition in paint, imagining colors, textures, brush calligraphy. And all this is lightly overseen by the attempt to bring into focus a vaguely yearned-for picture—something I need but can't see clearly yet. And so the emotions and imagination brood over tone and meaning, tugged by old obsessions, new objections, sharpened this week by the ache in my side that seems to be the physical sensation of loss. Ellen's whiteness starts to my eyes, her tension exaggerated by my own

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so that while I sketch I'm guided by the memory of a Dutch still life, a scaled and scrubbed fish on a silver plate, shocking among the plump fruit and gorgeous flowers. The silver of the tray suggests the hook no longer in the fish's mouth.

Now it is late back at the apartment. Jamie hasn't called all week, and I haven't called her. My instinct is to let a little time pass. Maybe I'm hoping time by itself will change something. But I do need the time, myself, to reflect. There's so much I hadn't seen before.

I had imagined it was the same here for the two of us, but it wasn't. Things were changed here for Jamie more than they were for me. I was happily detached, working in privacy away from distraction, but I was still selling, through you, to the same people in New York. Jamie, though, had been taken away from the shops where she had been selling her things. To ship them east would have cost almost her whole profit. So she was on the road, out of the studio, selling at fairs which, good as they are, don't compare to her old markets in either return or prestige. How could I have failed to recognize this? What kept her from saying anything until she had decided to leave?

I'm going to drive up and see her. I'll write again in a few days.

John

John Ordway
503 Lime Bluffs Road
Delphi, Iowa

July 21, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

I went up to see Jamie. She's living in a small, tidy apartment in a complex. It belongs to another artist she'd gotten to know at the fairs. They both travel a lot so aren't often there together. The woman, Andrea, is a photographer. I didn't meet her. Jamie says Andrea was glad to find someone to help with the rent for a while.

Seeing Jamie there reminded me of visiting her in the hospital in New York two years ago when she had that kidney

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infection. I felt the same strangeness and anxiety—the tense air of convalescence. But this time I was the sick one. I caught myself watching her face for clues the way you watch a doctor's.

We sat across from each other in the apartment's small living room, me on the tan couch, Jamie in a matching chair. Around us on the light blue walls were hundreds of Andrea's photographs hung in neat rows. She's a portraitist and every photo was a black-and-white headshot of a woman looking straight into the camera. Jamie's gaze at me was multiplied by the photos behind her.

I told her I had done some thinking, and I talked about the kinds of things I described to you in my letters—my realizations about the way the move has worked out for her. When I finished there was a long, unbearable pause. Then I remember her exact words. She said: "There used to be space. We used to have fun. But since the move it's like we've been on some kind of mission. My work is important to me, but you think *everything* is about work. Maybe if it gave you more pleasure . . . but it's always there, I don't know, like some kind of big black bird perched on your shoulder."

I asked why we couldn't have talked about this before, why she had to leave first, and she said it seemed like heresy to question what we were doing. Finally she just had to break away to think things through. We said we'd talk again in a few days. I don't know what happens next, and I don't think she does, either.

I started home that night, but it was late. I stopped at a picnic area out in the country at the side of the road and got my sleeping bag out of the trunk. It was a clear, quiet night and I fell asleep quickly. At dawn, when I woke up, my face and hair were wet with dew, but I wasn't chilled. I was at the edge of a broad, sloping cornfield extending down to a line of willows where a creek ran. Beyond the creek, farms stretched to the horizon, each house with its barn and silo, windbreak and sheds, surrounded by the big fields—hay, soybeans, more corn. I stood and listened to the birds calling from the tops of poplars like muezzins in their minarets. I didn't understand anything I saw. Where do I belong?

John

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John Ordway
503 Lime Bluffs Road
Delphi, Iowa

July 23, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

A bad night tonight. Even if she left a situation, a place, she also left me. She *could* leave me. She conceived of it and she did it. I had been avoiding taking that in. I've been out walking. It's hot and close and everything is pressing in.

She had the idea to leave and it grew in her mind. When she looked at me then, she was thinking about it. She thought about it, and she looked at me, and after a while the reasons for leaving became more important than the reasons for staying.

When I'm in the apartment things flash at me. It was another hot night and we were cooking. Mrs. Tolman had given me some fresh sweet corn from her garden. We were boiling it and the steam in the small, hot kitchen was unbearable. Even with the window open, the room got hotter and hotter. We peeled off our clothes and stood there naked, making a salad, slicing some cold cuts. When everything was done we moved the table out to the sitting room and ate there. We were so hungry and so hot, we didn't bother to get dressed. We sat across from each other, our faces smeared with butter from the sweet, yellow corn.

I remember another night in the kitchen. I was cutting up a head of cauliflower for a soup and the knife slipped. I cut the fleshy base of my thumb on the left hand. Jamie tried to bandage it closed for me, but it kept gaping. She said it needed to be stitched but I didn't want to go to the emergency room. I didn't think we could afford it. So she boiled a needle and some nylon thread from her weaving box. I sat in the kitchen with my arm on the table and clenched my good hand while she stitched the cut. She said she had watched carefully when she'd gotten stitches in her arm as a girl. She was always a good seamstress. She finished making the soup, we ate, and then she came around and sat on my lap and kissed me. Then we went upstairs and made love sweetly. The stitches were so close and fine, today there's almost no scar.

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I don't know where it all went. Lately, we just struggled ahead, living our own inward dramas—for weeks at a time they barely overlapped.

I hope you don't mind me writing to you like this, Wyatt. Tonight I just can't stand it alone.

John

John Ordway
503 Lime Bluffs Road
Delphi, Iowa

July 27, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

Very hot and humid again this week. A big fan in the studio makes it just bearable, and I've been taking walks evenings when it cools a little. I go out to one of the little parks and walk the ridge trails or sit by one of the cool springs. There's a point after sunset when the trees flatten into silhouettes and the sky shows through their branches in bright copper ingots. For me, the impulse to paint comes from seeing such things alone. They are uncontainable.

I think Jamie feels stuck. She's not ready to break things off entirely and go back to New York, but says she can't come back here. We talked on the phone this week, and I feel she may stay where she is for a while as we both try to figure things out. I feel stuck, too. I know I can't go back to New York—if that's what Jamie wants me to do. (I haven't asked.) But I have thought about the possibility of moving up near the Twin Cities. I've wondered if that would work as a kind of compromise. At the same time, I know it's too soon for that sort of thing, mainly because I still don't know how much of our problem really has to do with geography. Maybe it's all about me. We still have a hard time talking.

In the meantime, I try to work. Today more studies with Ellen, and I may be getting somewhere. I'm working out the details of a composition in which she is seated, facing forward, in a kind of crouch with her knees together and pointing left. At the same time she is looking to the right, her face in profile.

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There's a difficulty in the posture which communicates unease, and I've added to the stiffness by flattening the rendering, giving the whole a hint of the primitive. She is situated on a grassy bank beside a stylized version of our local "Redding's Spring," which spates out of a limestone bluff and down a rocky creekbed. The stream riffles down beside her arm on the left, mirrored by her white-blond hair which blows behind her arm on the right. Her left side, from breast to hip, will be painted against small plants lush with red berries, and the outer border will be dense with foliage and a few wildflowers. But she looks to the right, away from the berries and the running spring.

I think I can start painting soon. All best until next time.

John

John Ordway
503 Lime Bluffs Road
Delphi, Iowa

July 30, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

It seems clear that I'm going to have to get some kind of job. The checking account is Jamie's. It was always the money she made with her pots and weavings, supplemented by withdrawals from the small (sometimes very small!) savings account where we put the checks from my sales. She'll keep the checking account and I'll live out of the savings. To split up our finances seems a harsh symbol, but we can't very well go on living out of the same accounts as things stand now. Jamie will be fine—better off than when we were together. And I guess I'll find out to what extent she was subsidizing me. I figure I'm all right for two or three months, depending on new sales. Beyond that I'll have to supplement my painting income.

The picture is progressing. I find myself thinking of it as Milton's Eve troubled after her dream, but that's not exactly right. It's slightly vertical: 42 × 38 inches. The green in it is the dark, heavy shade of late July in Iowa, a green just crossing from vigor to weariness. But the figure, apart from the torsion of the pose, is all ravishment. Above the tense legs and below

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the averted face, the high white breasts look you straight in the eyes. Health, beauty, pleasure—it could break your heart. I don't know how much of this I'm getting from Ellen and how much is projection, but that hardly matters as far as the painting is concerned. There's far to go, but I'm very hopeful about it.

John

John Ordway
606 Raven Street
Delphi, Iowa

August 9, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

Your idea about a show is interesting. I have mixed feelings about it. Certainly a few sales would help right now. On the other hand, I feel the new work I've just begun will be a real advance over the things I brought out to you this summer, so it's hard for me to think about representing myself with the old work just now. You can see how I'm torn between the feelings I have about the pictures and the economics of the situation. What do you advise?

I'm tightening my belt. I've sublet the apartment and moved into the studio. The bed fits into the foot of the studio's "L," along with a small refrigerator and a hot plate, and I've separated off that space with a curtain. Two chairs and lamps fit at the north end of the long room, so I still work under the big south windows.

Of course, Ellen wondered what was going on the next time she came to work, so I told her the whole story. It made me realize how little we had actually spoken. After that first meeting when we had agreed on the terms of her job, I had done little more each time than say hello, make a little polite conversation, then give her directions for the poses. I generally don't talk while I work, and it must have been strange for her. She's not a professional model, after all.

She listened carefully but didn't comment on what I had told her. As I painted I thought I could see it working behind her

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eyes. Maybe she felt a little funny about the bed behind the curtain. So I made conversation, asking how she felt by now about being painted. The charcoal studies were taped to the walls all around. She glanced at them and said, "At first I felt uncomfortable, but now most of the time I think the pictures have very little to do with me. I'm just here—like a vase of flowers or a bowl of fruit—and you're over there doing your work. That's when it's easy. But once in a while a sketch will surprise me and I'll feel like I've really been seen in a way people usually aren't. But that doesn't happen so often."

I asked if any of the studies really "saw" her. She nodded at a small one taped high on the wall across from us. "The eyes and the hands," she said. In the study her head points to the right, but the eyes glance out at the viewer with a startled look, as if she's just discovering that someone is looking at her. The hands are apart from her sides, pressing the bank as she leans back on her arms. But the fingers are spread as if her hands have just flexed out, ready to push her up, and the muscles are tightened into the arms and shoulders.

Tonight I'm scraping down the eyes and hands on the big canvas to repaint them as they are in the small study. But I may have to start all over. I don't know yet.

John

John Ordway
606 Raven Street
Delphi, Iowa

August 17, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

I have to tell you a story. I almost burned down the studio last night.

Jamie came down with the van yesterday to pick up her kiln bricks, iron, and batting. She's found space for her wheel at Andrea's photography studio and the apartment complex is letting her build a kiln off in a corner of its yard. Andrea came with her and when Jamie introduced us we shook hands. Andrea's tall and lanky with slightly stooped shoulders. Her

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long black hair was tied back, but loose strands of it swung around her face. She has a strong, rather Roman nose and dark steady eyes. She's very tall—maybe over six feet tall. At any rate, I had the impression she was looking down at me from a height as the three of us carried the bricks from behind the sublet apartment and stacked them in the van. When we finished, Andrea offered to drive downtown and pick up something cold to drink, so Jamie and I sat on the front steps and had a few minutes to talk.

It was a lovely afternoon, hot, but with breezes under the maples. Jamie had on a white T-shirt and a pair of old jeans. Her bronze-colored hair was bright in the sun, and it reminded me of other times we had sat there, sometimes with our morning coffee or for a few minutes after lunch before we went back to work. But the recollection of those times only made me feel odd and desperate. I was acutely aware that Andrea would be back soon and they would drive back up to the Cities. There was a strange feeling in my chest, like a ball in there was pumped up too tight. My heart was pounding and I had the wild notion that I wanted to hold out my arms and shout "Stop!" to freeze everything. But I clamped down hard and tried to listen to Jamie.

She was talking about the pots she had sold in Minneapolis, getting to know the town, and plans for new work. She held her voice low, as if restraining her enthusiasm out of deference to my feelings, but clearly she was happy and excited. There was the light in her eyes of a person for whom all the windows and doors have been thrown wide open.

She asked about my work and I described the painting, but I was wrestling to keep down a rising panic so the words sounded hollow as I spoke. Just the same, Jamie nodded encouragingly. Then Andrea came back with a carton of juice and some paper cups. She poured out our drinks and we sat on the steps and talked about the town. Andrea said it didn't look like Iowa—too many hills and trees. It reminded her of villages she had seen in Yugoslavia. When we had finished the carton of juice, we all stood up. My heart pounded as if I had been running. Andrea said good-bye and walked to the van. Jamie gave me a hug and smiled, walked to the van, and they left.

It was worse than when she left the first time. She seemed so

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brightened by the move away. I stood there in the sunlight, feeling like some kind of shadow, all chilled and darkened. Was life with me really such a jail? I turned and started up the steps, and my hand was on the doorknob before I remembered the place wasn't mine anymore. As I walked across town toward the studio, I was still picturing the apartment's front room: its walls the color of fired, unglazed clay; the furniture we had collected together, some of which I had sold when I moved into the studio; the small couch, Jamie looking up from it and shaking her head and saying, "I have to go"; Jamie looking up from it another time and saying in a low voice, "Come here." I couldn't stop the chain of associations.

When I reached the studio the car wasn't there, and I remembered that I had driven to the apartment. So I turned around to go back for the car, but after a couple of blocks I stopped and sat down on a bench at the edge of a small park. I sat there like a dry stick blown out of a tree and couldn't imagine getting up, couldn't think where I had to go. After a long time I heard the six o'clock whistle, stood up, and started walking toward downtown. When I got there I went into a dim place called "Sammy's," sat down at the bar, and ordered a beer. When it came I sipped at it, but swallowing was hard because the tight ball in my chest had risen to the base of my throat. Then I heard a woman's voice call my name out of the dark somewhere behind me and I turned around.

I couldn't see very well into the row of booths with high, darkly-stained wooden backs, but then an arm rose from one of them and a face leaned forward into a little light. It was Jean. She waved me over and introduced me to her husband, Jerry, and to another guy, Ron. I recognized Ron as the electrician who had been to the studio to wire in the line for my refrigerator and hot plate. His name was stitched onto the breast of his blue shirt. Jerry grinned from under a broad reddish moustache as Jean motioned for me to sit down.

Ron topped off my beer from their pitcher and said, "You here for supper? It's not much fun cooking on a hot plate, is it?" He smiled and I shook my head. Then Ron told Jean how we met at the studio and Jean asked me what I was doing living there. When I explained, she looked stricken. She looked so

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sorry I expected to see tears in her eyes, and I was so taken aback that for a minute I thought I was going to cry, myself.

Jerry said, "Listen, Jean and I just got back from a trip up north, and tonight we're driving out to check on the cabin we have over by the river. Why don't you come, too?" I had the impression that both Jerry and Ron had heard a lot about me from Jean. They were trying to be very friendly. Suddenly I felt exhausted, and I let myself relax toward all three of them.

They were just ordering food, so I ordered with them, but I didn't have much appetite. We finished the beer and ordered another pitcher. They talked and I listened, adding a word once in a while. We drank some more beer together and it was dark when we went outside. Ron said good night and I went with Jean and Jerry and got into their old white Chrysler.

Out in the country on the secondary roads it was almost completely dark. I sat cradled in the spacious back seat as the car plunged on its lush shocks. Over his shoulder, Jerry asked me smart, practical questions about how I support myself as an artist. Up front the dashboard gauges softly glowed between the two of them as they listened. I let myself sink into their care. It was like travelling with my parents on our long trips to the Rockies when I was a child. The brightness of the stars in the dark countryside reminded me of how I used to lie on the back window ledge, the cool glass a few inches from my face, and look out at the constellations as if I were an astronaut in my capsule.

The big car rolled languidly as we pulled off the blacktop onto gravel. I was drunk with comfort, not just the beer. In a few minutes we turned again, this time into a narrow dirt driveway arched over with trees and low brush so that the headlights lit a curving tunnel. It was like driving down a throat.

Finally we rolled onto grass and stopped. At the far edge of a small clearing, in the lights, I could see a one-room log cabin with a covered porch built out from the door. Jerry stayed in the car, waiting to turn out the lights until Jean and I had made our way to the cabin. Jean unlocked the place, went in, and lit a gas lantern. It was a simple room, but comfortable, with a brass bed across one end, a round table and three chairs in the middle, and a large open fireplace at the other end. Jean hung

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the lantern on a hooked wire over the table and Jerry came in and started to build a fire in the fireplace. "This may feel good after a little swim," he said. Then Jean tapped me on the arm and said, "Come on, I'll show you the river."

We made our way through the dark about fifty yards, moving away from the cabin and the car into an open space where the stars showed brightly. When we reached the riverbank there was just enough light to see that the stream was about thirty feet wide. The water riffled through shallows on our left, quieted when it flowed into the pool in front of us, then turned and ran smoothly into the dark woods to our right. Across the stream a hillside blotted out the low stars.

We stood and listened to the sound of water until Jerry came up behind us. Jean said to me, "You'll like this place," and the two of them began to take off their clothes. I did the same and followed them onto the sand at the inside of the river's crook. The night air was chilly against my skin and as we waded into the pool the water felt warm. The pool deepened quickly and the sand gave way to velvety bottom ooze that rose to the tops of my ankles. Jerry hung in the still point at the pool's center, treading water. Jean swam to the base of the cutbank where the water moved quickly around the bend, rolled onto her back, and let the current carry her to the tail of the pool, then she kicked over to the sand and sat in the shallows. I followed, and as I edged into the current I felt the warm water sliding by like a big muscle. I pushed myself in and rolled onto my back. The current, surprisingly swift, pulled me into the broad curve, turning me like a dial. I was moving feet-first, then head-first, then feet-first as the little swirls and eddies at the edge of the main current caught me. My ears were covered by the dark water and everything was hushed as I turned. I looked up as I went and the stars wheeled.

When I reached the pool's tail I rolled over and swam to the shallows. I could see Jean sitting on the sandbar and smiling at me, resting with the warm water up to her breasts. "I told you you'd like this place," she said. I smiled back and waded to the beginning for another float. Jerry was backing into the current at the pool's inlet, making the water hump over his shoulders as it flowed. I launched myself into the head of the pool and rolled

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onto my back. As I swung again with the strong current the night sky turned around and around.

At the end, a little dizzy, I climbed back onto the sandbar and sat down next to Jean. Then Jerry waded over to join us. He said, "That fire will feel good now," and Jean added, "Let's go see if it's still burning." So we stepped out onto the grass, picked up our clothes, and walked back to the cabin.

The fire was low, so Jerry added a log. Jean got some towels out of a wooden trunk at the foot of the bed and handed one to each of us. Then we all stood by the big fireplace, drying and warming. Jerry helped Jean with her back and she reached over with her towel and dried mine. In the firelight our bodies looked ruddy and perfect.

Jerry went to the bed and pulled off its quilt. He spread the quilt on the floor in front of the fireplace, sat down cross-legged, and set his clothes in a heap in front of him to warm. So we all sat in a row by the fire with our clothes in front of us, Jean to my left and Jerry on her other side. Jerry produced a bottle of blackberry brandy from somewhere, took a drink, and passed it down the line. The brandy was hot and sweet in my mouth. Then Jean turned to me and said, "I'm so sorry to hear that Jamie's moved out. You must be awfully lonely."

The low vibration of sympathy in her voice called to my self-pity, which quickly rose in my throat. Suddenly I was exhausted again. The fire and the brandy made me want to lie down. I imagined resting my head in Jean's lap and going to sleep. I must have been drunk. I'd never felt so maudlin. I looked at Jean and tried to answer, tried to say "yes," but my voice cracked and I sobbed hard once before I caught myself. But that was enough. She quickly slid over behind me and put her arms around my shoulders. She stroked my chest and murmured, "That's all right. That's all right."

I had drawn her many times, but now her body was soft behind me. I let myself relax against her. Jerry said, "That's okay, man. I know it's tough," and he leaned over and put his hand on my leg.

I came back to myself with a little start. I sat up and said, "You're both very kind. You know, I'm really tired."

Jerry said, "Sure. It's late. We should take you home," and we stood and dressed.

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We were quiet on the drive to town. I slumped in the big back seat, woozy with fatigue. I just wanted to sleep, but my mind wouldn't stop. I wasn't sure what had happened. I looked at the two of them in the front seat and wondered who they were. I closed my eyes, but I started to spin and a wave of nausea swept over me. So I opened my eyes and focussed on the highway's center line until we reached town and my studio.

I got out of the car, said good-bye, and went upstairs. By the single overhead light the studio seemed harsh and desolate, with shadows extending from my reading chair, my work stool, and the easel. The big painting of Ellen, almost finished, stood on the easel at the far end of the long room. I had been working on it steadily for three weeks, but now it looked strange to me. I walked over to it and my eyes jumped first to the very white torso. It was the only part of the figure facing straight out of the canvas, recommending itself—despite itself—to my sight. Upon the white breasts the pink of the aureoles intensified into the beads of the nipples, red like the berries along the left flank. I thought: this isn't Eve, it's Suzannah in the eyes of the elders. Then I thought: no, it's Ellen. And then my eyes snapped to her startled eyes, the flexed hands, and the knees brought up awkwardly, as if caught halfway in a gesture of concealment.

Nausea rose again so quickly that I just had time to drop to my knees over the wastebasket before I was sick. After a few minutes, when I was able to steady myself, I went and got a mat knife and cut the canvas out of its stretchers. I took it down the stairs, went outside, and found Mrs. Tolman's wire incinerator stowed in the garage. I carried the incinerator to the back yard, rolled the canvas into a long tube, dropped it into the blackened wire container, and struck a match.

The flames rose along the sides of the big rolled canvas. Quickly, the oil in the fresh paint flared up hard. The canvas was tilted in the wire cage like the barrel of a cannon and I heard a low moaning sound as the fire sucked air into the bottom of the tube and flames began to shoot from the hole in the top. The rolled canvas spouted like a roman candle and chugged like a chimney fire. It burned wildly, flames shooting four feet out of its top. It lit up the whole back yard and then

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I saw that, in the darkness, I had set the incinerator under a tree and the high flames were licking the lowest branches.

I kicked the incinerator over, but the tindery leaves on a dead branch had already ignited. The fire swept up through the tree, branch by branch, until its whole top was engulfed. I stood and watched as the big yellow sheets of flame rose and folded on themselves, leaping as high as the rooftop. The entire tree shook and roared. It was the only tree in the yard, but it was near the house, so when the flames jumped they touched the eaves.

I shook myself and ran for the garden hose, turned on the outdoor spigot, and sprayed down the back of the house. The screen door slammed and I saw Mrs. Tolman standing at the edge of the yard in her bathrobe, struck dumb and still, staring up into the fire. As quickly as the nausea had come in the studio, a wave of laughter swept up and shook me. Then I looked and saw the adjacent yards lighted by the flaming tree and the neighbors lumbering forward heavily in their pajamas and robes. The firelight colored them all yellow and orange, with long black shadows shifting behind them on the lawns. I expected to see a firetruck wheel up next with its spotlights and clamor, but, strangely, no one had called the fire department. Everyone stood dumbstruck as the fire peaked and began to subside.

I kept the hose on the siding and eaves of the house until the flames had dropped. Then I turned the hose on the tree and soaked down the branches. Gradually everyone—even Mrs. Tolman—just turned away and went back inside. When there were no more coals glowing in the tree I shut off the hose, went inside, and fell into bed.

I woke up to a knock on the door at eight o'clock. It was Mrs. Tolman and she asked me to move out right away. I nodded, closed the door, and went back to bed. This afternoon I've been packing.

Wyatt, I feel like a sleepwalker. I'm staggering in slow motion and everything else is racing in a blur around me. Just a few weeks ago I thought I knew who I was and what I was doing. Now that's all gone and I don't know what's going to happen next.

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I just want to sleep. Writing this whole thing out to you has made me very tired.

John

John's letter of August 17th startled me. The description of his strange night was clear and measured, as usual. He can hardly express himself in any other way. But the events themselves alarmed me. I tried to call him, but the telephone at the studio had been disconnected and directory assistance had no new listing. I assumed, then, that he had moved, and I wasn't sure a letter would be forwarded. I waited for a week, hoping for another letter.

When I heard nothing I told myself that if he had been looking for a new apartment and had been busy moving he wouldn't have had time to write. I waited for another week, expecting a letter each day. No letter came, and still directory assistance had no new listing. I mailed a letter addressed simply with John's name, town, and state, hoping that the village post office would know its clients well enough that the letter would reach him. But it came back to me. I felt completely cut off. By now it had been three weeks since his last letter had arrived. I tried to tell myself that there was nothing to worry about, but I was becoming more and more alarmed.

I telephoned Jamie and told her about John's letter and about having lost contact with him. She hadn't heard from him since her trip to Delphi with Andrea. She remembered that he had been very quiet that day, and she thought he was angry with her. She had been waiting for him to call. I could hear the worry in her voice as we spoke, and as her fear grew she became furious with me for not calling right away. Finally she said, "Look, I'll find him and call you."

Jamie phoned back twenty minutes later. She had called the hospital in Delphi and had learned that John had been admitted August 18th and released three days later. They wouldn't give her any more information. She said she was going to drive down to find him and would call me again.

She called the next evening from a motel room in Delphi. She sounded exhausted. She said she had found John, that he was okay, and that she would write me with more information in a couple of days. She said I shouldn't worry, and I didn't press her for details. Her letter arrived four days later.

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Jamie Stevens
Pine View Motel
Delphi, Iowa

September 12, 1990

Dear Wyatt & Alice,

Well, he's safe. I had imagined everything possible. I always remember what my mother said when she visited us in New York for the holidays three years ago—the first time she met John. She said, "Either he's from another planet, or someday he's going to explode." She had been watching the way he took things in without anything coming back out.

I remember what I said, too. I told her that I loved his calm, the steadiness of his body while his eyes nervously took in everything around. I told her that was why he painted, that's when things came back out, and that's why he didn't have to explode. So when you told me he had burned the big, new painting, I wondered, is this it?

Wyatt, I'm sorry I shouted at you on the phone the other night—I was just so scared. Part of me couldn't believe that anything really bad had happened, but it seemed so wrong that you hadn't heard from John in three weeks. He had been quiet the last I'd seen him, and I thought he was angry with me, so I was giving him space.

After we talked on the phone I called the Delphi hospital and was told that John had been a patient but had been released a week ago. I drove down in a panic and got there about midnight. A woman at the hospital reception desk gave me John's new address. He'd taken a room at a small residential hotel near the business district. I drove there and saw his car parked in the street and it made me feel a lot better to know where he was. There were no lights on anywhere in the building so I went to the motel near the highway and got a room.

I went back to the hotel first thing in the morning. It's a dim little place that smells like wilted lilacs. In the tiny lobby it seemed like the middle of the night, even at 7 A.M. Behind the desk, a woman of about sixty with silver hair and a lot of heavy rings gave me a hard look up and down when I asked for John's room number, but she gave it to me.

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I went upstairs and knocked on the door and right away John's voice said "Come in." I opened the door and there he was, sitting at a little square table. There wasn't anything on the table, not a newspaper or a glass of water. He was just sitting there. I stood in the doorway, feeling flustered all of a sudden. I had come down to find him, and there he was, but I couldn't think what to do next. He sat there, his eyes a little wide, waiting for me to say something. When I finally told him I'd been worried I must have sounded like a mother scolding a child who's been lost. I told him you had called me, that you were worried too, and that the hospital had given me his address. He looked down, then, like he was embarrassed.

He told me to come in and sit down, and then he got up and shut the door and returned to his chair. He explained to me about the hospital. I can only tell you that he wasn't hurt and he's basically all right. Well, that may be glossing over things too much. You know, it's awkward trying to reassure you, to fill you in without betraying confidence. There are things it's not up to me to tell you. I did make him promise to write you soon.

That hotel's an awful place. I felt like we were crouching in a shoebox. He was on a wooden chair at one end of the room and I was in a small green one with threadbare arms. Next to me was a single bed under the room's one window. The toilet and shower were down the hall, I guess.

I said that if he stayed here for very long he'd have no place to work, but he just shook his head, as if that were the last thing on his mind. And that's what worries me more than anything else. He seems adrift, and I've never seen that in him before. Of course, I can't help but feel responsible. If I thought that getting the apartment back and trying to make everything the way it was before would do us any good, I'd try it. But, God, it was just so joyless. We were making pots and weavings and paintings as if our lives were at stake. It wasn't just that money was tight. Somehow we had gotten desperate about the work, as if there wasn't anything else. We worked like demons. Or maybe we weren't the demons—the demon was at the door with his big mouth wide open, and if we didn't keep hurling the pots and the paintings down his gullet, he'd come in after us.

Maybe I felt that way more than John. He always talked in terms of the progress he was making and not making, thinking

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about a project or a series that would be "an advance." I loved that in him, and you know I admire his work as much as you do. But after the move it was all so grim. We were walking around like a couple of clenched fists, all white knuckles.

John and I talked about these things. I took him out of that desperate room to find some breakfast and we sat and talked in a cafe all morning. At lunch time we ate again, and then went for a walk in one of the parks and talked some more. Finally, late in the afternoon I told him I couldn't stand the thought of him going back to the hotel, and we got into the van and went looking for another place. There were ads in the paper and signs in the windows of some homes, and we eventually found a room upstairs in a house on the south side of town. An outside stairs goes up to a private entrance on the second floor, and there's a bedroom, sitting room, bath, and efficiency kitchen. It's small—there's no real studio space—but the whole thing is freshly painted and clean. We went back to the hotel, checked John out, and moved him into the new rooms. He was docile about the whole thing—grateful I was helping, I think, but kind of blank. It reminded me of the other thing my mother said about him: "He's like one of those talking bank machines," she said, "courteous, complete, but there's no one there." I yelled at her then, but it seemed true today.

I'm writing this from my motel room in Delphi, will go back to the Cities tomorrow, but John and I have agreed to talk on the phone every week. He says he's looking for a job, that he just wants a routine for a while and time "to take stock." I'll enclose his new address, but, as I said, I made him promise to write to you himself. I don't know what else I can do right now. It all feels out of my control, out of anyone's control.

Love,
Jamie

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Jamie Stevens
2663 Lilleskare Road, #110
Minneapolis, MN

September 24, 1990

Dear Wyatt & Alice,

I got your letter. I'm surprised you haven't heard from John by now. He called a few days ago and he says he's taken a job. He was a little vague about it, but he's doing something at a recycling warehouse in Delphi. I guess he sounded all right, but not real eager to talk. I asked him to come up and help me with a firing at the end of the week, and he said he would, so I should see him then. I didn't ask directly, but I don't think he's painting.

You ask what I think will happen, what I want to happen—an aggressive question, even for close friends. But I don't mind trying to answer. I've been giving it a lot of thought, of course, but I honestly don't *know* what I want to happen. It's hard to focus when I think about the future. I'm still trying to figure out what *has* happened.

I tell myself versions. One begins in Watkins Glen, New York, living in a small town and telling myself when I left for college, "Never again." At the end of that one I'm standing at my kitchen sink in Delphi peeling potatoes and asking myself, "How did *this* happen?"

Another begins at a pottery wheel in a studio at Cornell next to the Fall Creek gorge. I think it was the spring of my sophomore year, and I had just finished throwing a copy of a big Chinese jar. I stepped outside into the sunlight and heard the sound of the falls, then looked back through the door to the shape of the jar still on the wheel and fell in love with what I had done. That was probably when I made up my mind that, whatever else I was doing, I would always make things. All those stupid night jobs in the city—working as a bartender, radio dispatcher, message service operator—were to earn a little money and keep my days free for making things. Then the good job at the gallery kept me from working, and so when John came up with the idea of the move, so that we could try to live on art, I agreed. The funny thing about this story is that,

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after the move, when it was all art, it wasn't enough. I'd get up from the wheel or my loom, step outside and wonder, "Where's the rest of it?" I'd gotten used to the back-and-forth in New York. I'd do pots or weaving as long as I could, then go off through the crowded streets to a job or a show or to see some friends. And when I'd get back to my work I'd have seen something, I'd be someplace else, with a new idea or a new angle on things. But in Delphi it was all me—and John. I felt, in a funny way, like I was living off my capital—no new income.

And then there's the version that starts in the Loft Co-op when John kept finding reasons to drop by during my studio hours. I remember how casual his little visits seemed, how he always acted surprised to run into me, but I could see how deliberate they were, and he was very attentive and cheerful and funny. God, I was being courted! I was usually covered with clay and he was rummaging around looking for stretchers or rags, but it felt like we were on some porch swing sipping lemonade. He was very sweet and careful, and I was flattered. Well, you remember all that. It was a good time, with John's show that spring and my first run of good sales and commissions. We'd both been in New York for quite a while—it had been six years for me—but we met just as things were beginning to break for each of us. We felt like good luck to each other. We had a lot of fun with you two, with the Loft crowd, and with Mary and Tina and Judd and all the rest. We were almost never alone, except when we were working.

And then in Delphi we were always alone. When we'd decided to move, the whole idea of a retreat seemed very appealing. John was starting to sell paintings regularly and I was building up a good network of clients and shops that liked my things, but we both had to keep our part-time jobs to make things work, even after we moved in together. My job at the gallery was good, but it was a real job and took a lot of time. We were getting pretty tired. So when John's friend, Judd, came back from Iowa City and talked about the writers he'd met out there who had been to the workshop and decided to stay, it started the wheels turning. Judd told us about this little pocket up in the northeast corner of the state where somebody had taken him fishing and canoeing. It sounded nice, the rents would be cheap, we'd be out of the city hassles, and John felt

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comfortable with the Midwest, having grown up in Chicago. I tended to think of it as a sort of open-ended experiment.

I thought I wanted peace and space and time, and for a while it was pretty good. I didn't count on the loneliness. I started having second thoughts and I remembered a story that Tina had written—the one about the woman who goes to visit an old friend and her husband who live in a big dream house up in the country somewhere. The couple latch onto her, they don't want her to go, they seem desperate to keep her and talk to her and show her things and take her places. She's having a good time and everything, but it feels a little strange. Every time she mentions leaving, this look of fear comes up in her friend's eyes and the husband quickly suggests two or three things they still want to do. Finally, up in a corner of the big house, in a little sewing closet or something, the woman confides in her friend. She says being married, being a couple, is so hard it's too much for just two people. They're lonely, they can't do it alone. They need help.

It's funny. I can sit here at my loom, and what I'm weaving isn't there yet, but I can see it clearly. I know the pattern, no matter how complicated, and I work ahead. But my own past, which is already there, is a mystery. I can't find the pattern, or there are too many. So how do I know what comes next? There's a sense of waiting to see. I've never felt exactly like this before.

Love,
Jamie

Jamie Stevens
2663 Lilleskare Road, #110
Minneapolis, MN

September 30, 1990

Dear Wyatt & Alice,

John was here Friday—I think I told you he was coming up to help me fire some things. We worked all night, rested up Saturday, and then he drove home that evening. He told me he still hasn't been in touch with you and we talked for quite a

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while about why he hasn't written. After falling out of touch when he was in the hospital, I think he doesn't know how to start up again. And maybe there are some things he feels he'd have to tell you that he hasn't figured out how to talk about yet. Now that so much time has passed, I think he's feeling a little embarrassed, too. I suggested he break the ice with a phone call. (He doesn't have a phone at the apartment, so you can't call him. He walks to the drugstore to use the pay phone.) He said maybe he would.

Now it's a quiet Sunday afternoon, and Andrea and I are taking the day off. We're seldom both here. When we are, though, I enjoy her company. We've made tea and have been looking at some of her photography books while the two cats—Rosie and Flo—wander around searching for the warmest patches of sunlight on the floor.

Andrea and I had been at a lot of the same shows in the past year, but we'd never spoken until our set-ups were next to each other at the outdoor fair in Milwaukee this July. The fair was a big one and there was a nice view of the lake from our booths, but we didn't have the best location because we were off on one edge and out of the main traffic. It was deadly hot and Andrea had an awning, so we sat together in her shade and took turns going to fill the water jug. I had remembered her photos from other shows and was glad to have the chance for a closer look. She does a lot of portraits. This time she had a group of women at their jobs—a girl in a theatre ticket booth gazing as blankly as a mannequin behind the glass, a middle-aged receptionist wearing too much make-up and jewelry, a nurse leaning against a wall in the middle of the night (the most exhausted-looking person I've ever seen), a young lawyer holding a tremendous book in her arms like a shield in front of her chest, and a big older lady with a wide grin on her face as she trimmed a poodle's claws. I think you'd like her things. Some are funny and some are harrowing. She's got a good eye. She took some shots of me at my booth. I was sitting between two of the tall jars with a big, woolly tapestry behind, smiling straight into the camera. When I saw the pictures later they surprised and pleased me. What shall I say? I hadn't felt *seen* like that for a long time.

We sat under the awning, sipping water, and talked about

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our work and how we make ends meet. She's easy to talk to, and as the day went along I started thinking out loud about the year since John and I had left New York. It was a relief finally to say some things that had been on my mind, and some of what I heard come out of my mouth surprised me. Before, when John and I had talked, we'd always done a careful balancing act. We countered every complaint with some remark about our new advantages. We were making less money, but our costs were down. We were isolated, but we were free. We were lonely, but we had more time for each other. Talking with Andrea, though, I blurted out, "God, I miss my friends, I miss seeing what they're doing, I miss the streets, I miss the smell of the Italian bakery down on our old corner. I even miss the smell of the bus exhaust!"

Andrea asked about John, and what I said then surprised me, too. I didn't even think. I just said straight out, "We never fight. We're good to each other. But, if I had to, I could live without him."

That stunned me a little, and we just sat quietly for a while. That's when I started to form the idea of leaving, and it confused me. After I talked it through with Andrea, I felt sure that I wanted to go back to the city, but I didn't know about leaving John. It was as though what I'd just said had opened a whole new area for me to think about, to feel my way through. Without knowing it, I'd begun to blame John for taking me away from my friends and the place I had considered my home. We had made the decision together, and at the time I thought it was the right thing. But doubts had crept in. I never said anything about them to John because he was always reinforcing our new life. I don't know if he was trying to talk me into it, or himself, but there was a lot of subtle propaganda in our conversations as he talked up the move in little indirect ways, buttressing the decision. That probably irritated me in ways I didn't even realize. I suppose I pulled back. At the same time, though, John's mind was always on his work. Sometimes when we ate lunch together, he'd stare at a wall, chewing with a vacant look on his face. I'd pull him back with a remark of some kind, but in a couple of minutes he was gone again. By the end of the three-day Milwaukee show I had decided to leave, and Andrea offered to share her place with me.

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That's over two months ago. Now when I see John things are changed. I'm not sure how to describe it. This weekend I felt like we had a pretty good time. We were up all night with the firing and did three big shallow bowls and a covered jar. Doing this work together was a familiar, comfortable routine. We slipped into our old jobs and worked together easily. It was the most time we'd spent together since I moved out, and there were long quiet stretches while the pots cooked. We sat on blankets and talked and stared up at the stars and napped a little when there wasn't anything else to do, just as we used to in Delphi. It felt like being with an old friend. Something was better, but only because of the split.

In Delphi we had developed a kind of "party line," but it was *his* line, and a lot of what *I* was feeling just didn't fit. And he didn't even know it. I was starting to be invisible to him.

For the time being, I'll stay here and live this life. But I think I want to come back to New York. I wish it were a year from now and the hard decisions were behind me. I miss you.

Love,
Jamie

John Ordway
423 1/2 River Street
Delphi, Iowa

October 1, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

I'm sorry that I haven't written before now. I've wanted to but didn't know how. I can only tell you the truth, and I haven't known how to do that. I can't say that I know yet how to tell you about the things that have happened in the last seven weeks. I've thought about it quite a lot. And just now I've been sitting at this table writing and not writing for about thirty minutes. Can you hear the long silences?

Here are the bare facts, as inadequate as they seem.

After the long night of August 16th, after the trip into the country and the fire in the yard at the studio, and after I wrote you the last letter, I went to sleep and couldn't wake up. Even-

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tually someone came and took me to the hospital. I was there for three or four days, and then was taken to the state hospital at Liberty for psychiatric evaluation. After a week I was released. I came back to Delphi and took a room in a small residential hotel. Two weeks later Jamie came down and insisted that I move. She helped me find the small upstairs apartment where I am now. I've taken a job bookkeeping for a small recycling organization in town. It pays the rent, but I'm drawing down my savings for food and gas. If you still think you can arrange a show, go ahead. Whatever sales you can make would be very helpful.

I know you must have a lot of questions. Jamie said you and Alice were worried. I've been inconsiderate. But I think I'll break off, now. I've been at this quite a while and I'm getting tired. I'll finish tomorrow.

10/2

This is a struggle. I feel embarrassed and confused about my time in the hospital. I don't know what happened—something just gave way.

After I fell asleep in the studio, I would stir every once in a while and remember that I had to pack my things and find another place, but then I would go back to sleep. I was sluggish, I never woke up completely, things were a blur. When I did wake up a little I felt like I was at the bottom of a well and the effort of climbing out was more than I could muster. When I think back my sense of time is pretty hazy. I remember people coming in a couple of times. Then somebody got me up and helped me to a car or an ambulance—the fact that I can't remember which it was scares me now. Then I was at the hospital.

Mostly, they let me sleep there. I remember a couple of exams, some blood tests. A doctor roused me once and asked me questions about how I felt. I felt like lead. For the short periods when I was awake I felt very tense, very anxious, exhausted. But I slept most of the time, a heavy, wrenched sleep, the kind where you wake up more tired than before.

They told me all the tests were negative, that my symptoms suggested depression, and they sent me to Liberty. I was

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beginning to be awake more of the time, but the feeling of tension stayed with me. I kept trying to stretch and relax my arms and legs, but in a couple of minutes they were all flexed again. I'd been feeling something like that for quite a while this summer, but it was much worse now. The only relief I had was when I slept. That's what I told the doctor or counsellor who talked with me there. I guess he was a staff psychiatrist. He'd heard about the fire and wanted me to tell him about that. Then he asked me to tell him about my work as a painter, and as one thing led to another I told him how Jamie and I came to live in Delphi and that we had split up. I didn't withhold anything. I hoped he could help me. I was feeling pretty bad.

Most of our friends in New York had been in therapy at one time or another. You've told us a little about your own experience. But this was my first brush with all that, so I'm not sure I can judge how good this person was—Dr. Turnstile. I asked if he ever got any jokes about his name and he said no. He had me take pills for my anxiety and we talked for an hour every day.

10/3

Reading what I've written so far, all the facts are right but it doesn't sound true. This is what kept me from sending a letter earlier. (I did try to write to you from the hospital, but those letters—if you can call them letters—were even worse. I destroyed them.) But I don't want to be out of touch any more.

The week at Liberty passed in a sparse routine punctuated by meals and my daily sessions with Dr. Turnstile. I sat in an overstuffed chair in the corner of his office. He sat with his elbows on his desk gazing at his blotter and turning a pencil in his fingers. He asked questions and seemed to be satisfied with the broad outlines of things. He didn't probe. I think I was being categorized—sorted into the proper bin to be matched with a treatment. And maybe that's all right. I don't know what I expected. Someone brilliant, I think, with imagination, culture, and insight. A shaman in a beard and bow tie. Dr. Turnstile was tired and kind. The elbows of his sport coats were shiny.

At mealtimes we sat at long tables in the cafeteria that joined

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the men's and women's buildings. There were both sexes, but not much mixing. One evening at dinner the young man across from me put his hands in his lap, leaned over his tray, and began to sob.

Most of the rest of the time I was in my room. I had a bed and chair and dresser. There was another man in with me, about 70, who had been there a long time, I think. His name was Elwin, he had a big head of white hair, and every day he wore the same red and black cardigan sweater. I think he felt I was an intruder and he did his best to ignore me. He had a small black-and-white TV in the room and watched it all day. He never changed the channel—maybe he only got one.

In the room I still napped quite a bit, and when I was awake I tended to sit and look. I can remember becoming aware one time that I had been sitting and staring out the window at the bright side of a corrugated steel garden shed—for how long, I don't know—it could have been 40 minutes. There were times when I felt very emotional, but overall my strongest feeling was of relief—that the drug had stripped away the tension and I could just sit and be still.

10/4

I don't want to give you the impression I was completely out of it. There were exercise periods in the morning and afternoon when we could go out into the big fenced yard if we wanted to. And sometimes I walked around inside. There was a lounge with card tables, couches, and chairs. At one end a circle of patients watched TV. A nurse or intern sat quietly in one corner, reading or crocheting.

There was a small reading room that I liked. It had a couch and large glass doors opening to a small patio. You had to have permission to go in there, probably because of the glass doors, and I usually had it to myself. The view from there was of the sloping yard, a line of big oaks going bronze in front of a high cyclone fence, and beyond that a broad cornfield starting to brown and dry toward harvest.

At the end of the week Dr. Turnstile said he thought my anxiety was a short-term condition caused by recent trauma. He smiled sadly as he said that, and reassured me that I wasn't "ill"

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in any long-term way. He gave me the name of a counsellor in Delphi to see once in a while, a woman at the county human services agency. And he recommended that I seek out some contacts in town, spend less time alone. He wanted me to stay on the medication for a while.

I took the bus back to Delphi and found a room in the hotel.

10/5

I've just gotten home from work. I keep records of how many pounds of newsprint, cardboard, plastic, aluminum, and crushed glass are shipped out in semi trailers to reconstitution plants. My employer, Earth Day Industries, is housed in a new corrugated metal building about a half block long. It's not much to look at, but it's well-lit and ventilated. Inside there are a couple of simple offices, a big sorting room, another big room where the machinery for crushing cans and glass and plastic bottles operates, and a holding area opening into the loading dock.

I'm hired to work six hours a day, but sometimes I finish figuring and recording the previous day's totals in less time than that, so I go out and help with the sorting. A lot of that work is done by employees who, when I was in school, we called mentally retarded. There's a house where they live together with some kind of supervision, and they walk to work together across town with their lunch buckets. We sort cans and bottles and do light repairs when old furniture comes in that can be fixed and resold. One guy, Rich, showed me the ropes. Metal caps and rings have to come off the glass bottles. Clean glass goes in one bin. Metal goes in with the cans. Plastic jugs and bottles go in another bin. It is peaceful work, everyone milling carefully past one another from bin to bin. Rich says they're all going bowling Friday night. I'm invited.

Until next time,

All best,
John

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John Ordway
423 1/2 River Street
Delphi, Iowa

October 12, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

Yes, it's good to be back in touch. You said on the phone that I sound different. I *feel* different. There's a heaviness that I don't remember from before. Sometimes I just drag down to a full stop. I find myself sitting, staring out the window at a treetop waving. There's a vague melancholy, but more than that simply a physical sensation of weight, of fatigue. I can't tell whether it's sadness over the whole messed up situation here—whether it's missing Jamie and feeling that my life is all tangled up—or whether it's the drug I'm on. In the hospital, I told Dr. Turnstile that I was uncomfortable with taking medicine for emotions. He said, "If you had some sort of a chemical imbalance that affected your kidneys, you wouldn't feel funny about taking something, would you? So, if you have too much of a particular enzyme at your synapses, why should there be anything wrong with taking something to help with that problem?" The physician's view of the body and the self had never struck me quite so forcefully. He saw me as a tangle of chemical reactions jilted out of balance.

I've seen the woman at the county health services a couple of times—Caroline Evans. She's referring me to another doctor nearby to have my medication checked. She's interesting, someone I can talk to.

Ellen stopped by the apartment to talk for a while yesterday. It was late afternoon and that time of day the sun comes into my little kitchen. We sat at the table and drank tea. She said she was sorry, but she couldn't work with me any more. Her mother had pleaded with her, told her people were talking, especially after the fire. Ellen said, "I know they're wrong, but it's a very small town and there are a lot of people who assume that a woman with her clothes off in the presence of a man can mean only one thing. Some people had started to look at me differently. Then, after the fire, I guess there were a lot of people who said to each other, 'See, I told you.' At the library, I only

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catalog and reshelve, now. Mrs. Steegers took me off the circulation desk. She says some people have told her they don't feel comfortable around me. Can you believe it?"

I shook my head. I told her, as far as I was concerned, she shouldn't worry. I understood. She looked pretty down about it, so I tried to lighten things up. I smiled and said, "Well, Ellen, I suppose they're right. A woman with her clothes off in the presence of a man is always about sex in some way or another."

As soon as I said that, I felt nervous about it, but she smiled back and said, "You know, you really blew it with that fire. My mother says Mrs. Tolman's neighbors can't stop telling the story. They say: 'The whole tree was on fire, shaking like a big torch in the dark!' "

I said, "You should have seen them standing there in their pajamas, gaping up at it! I almost turned the hose on them." Then we both cracked up. We laughed hard and couldn't stop. We bent over the table holding our sides, laughing, and then we tipped back in our chairs with our mouths wide open and laughed some more. We howled. I can't remember the last time I had laughed like that. Afterwards, we just sat there and grinned. Ellen was still smiling when she asked, "How did you manage that, anyway? What in the world were you doing?"

So I told her about burning the painting.

She asked why, her face serious now.

I tried to tell her how it struck me that night, how I had seen it differently. I said it felt suddenly as though I had done her wrong, that I had taken something from her and twisted it.

"You make it sound very personal," she said. "I didn't think it was supposed to be like that. You can do what you want in your paintings, can't you?"

I nodded. Then she said, "It was a pretty interesting painting. You probably shouldn't have burned it." She stood up, put her hand on my shoulder, leaned over, and gave me a friendly kiss on the cheek. We smiled at each other and I let her out.

It pains me—it torments me—that Ellen is being talked about because of her work with me. This is her hometown. It touches her whole family. It only takes a handful of small-minded gossips—and now she's being treated like an untouchable at the library!

She must have known she was taking a risk modelling for me,

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that some people would talk. She knows her town. Why did she do it? And, after all that's gone on, she certainly wasn't timid in coming up to my apartment yesterday. That was considerate and brave. And for a moment, laughing hard in my kitchen, we were together under that burning tree. There's a fire in her, too. I shouldn't have destroyed the painting.

John

John Ordway
423 1/2 River Street
Delphi, Iowa

October 24, 1990

Dear Wyatt,

Yes, a show in November would be fine. It won't be a big one, and those paintings seem like ancient history to me now, but I'll be happy for the chance to sell some things. Yes, November is sudden, and all the stress and strain of preparations will be on you, I'm afraid. I hope you haven't juggled the gallery schedule and made a lot of headaches for yourself. As always, thanks. I'm very grateful. God knows I need the money as soon as possible, if anything sells.

No, I haven't spoken to Jamie for about three weeks. The last time I saw her was when I went up to help with a raku firing. I drove up on a Friday afternoon and we did the work that night. (In Delphi we had gotten into a pattern of nighttime firings, partly because it was cooler, partly because we liked the long unbroken stretches of time and the way the flames and sparks looked in the dark.) In the big triangular yard of her apartment complex, she had built a kiln and connected it to tanks. It was a small kiln and her pieces were big, so we could only do one thing at a time. We put in a large covered jar and started to bring the heat up. While Jamie kept an eye on the temperature, she sent me into the apartment to eat some supper. I sat at the kitchen table with the soup and sandwich she had saved for me, browsing the magazines stacked there. In the pile was a folder of photographs Andrea had taken of Jamie.

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There were pictures of Jamie among her pots and weavings at an outdoor setup at a fair. I've always been taken by photos of artists among the things they have made. There's a poignance and triumph in them. The individual who has labored through difficulty and confusion stands at last among the realized conceptions. Jamie sat in a director's chair, at ease between two slender jars. The one on the left, rising to her elbow, was decorated with fanciful uneven stripes in different shades. The taller one, to her right, was lightly mottled with an organic pattern something like clusters of narrow leaves. Its elegant, stretched shape makes you think of a palm tree or a woman. Jamie's leg, crossed over her other knee, swung out in front of the tall piece so the curve of her calf and the side of the jar cut the same shape. Behind her, a woolly horizontal weaving with vertical strips in coarse textures set off the smooth line of her hair and cheek. Her personal beauty was reflected and magnified in the beauty of the things she had made.

There were more pictures, some of Jamie at her wheel and close studies of her hands raising the sides of a bowl; there were photos of her shot through the harnesses of her loom and from above as she pulled the reed down the warp strings. At the back of the folder there were nudes. When I came to them my throat tightened and panic surged up. What did this mean? In each picture Jamie's figure was lit in the foreground against a dark backdrop. In one, she was seated in a simple wooden chair, sitting up straight but relaxed, her knees and ankles together and her hands in her lap. Above the familiar curves of her shoulders, breasts, waist, and hips, she looked directly into the camera. Her smile was changed by the tilt of her chin, which was raised a little, proudly. In another picture, her back formed a white shape, and her hair, wound in a single thick braid, fell between her shoulder blades. I recognized the three birthmarks that made a small triangle near her waist.

As I looked at the photos I saw Jamie as I had in those early weeks in New York, when we were first living together, but she was also changed. There was a new dignity and stature and accomplishment. I saw her freshly, but it was through Andrea's eyes. I felt admiration and confusion, love and jealousy and fear. In a single gesture, the pictures had given Jamie back to me and taken her away.

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I went back out into the yard. It was dark, and Jamie's silhouette interrupted the kiln's dim light when she moved back and forth. The air had grown cold after the sun went down. I went to my car and put on an extra sweater. I got a blanket out of the trunk, walked back to the kiln, spread my blanket on the ground nearby, and sat down. Jamie was sitting on another blanket. There was no moon, and though we were only seven or eight feet apart, I couldn't see her. Her voice came out of the dark when she said, "The kiln's working fine, but it'll be a good while before the first piece comes out." Then it was quiet except for the low hiss of the gas jet.

I was lying on my back with my hands behind my head. The stars were dim because of the city's lights in the distance. Once in a while a car went past on a nearby road. There were bits of conversation at wide intervals. Sometimes Jamie switched on a flashlight and looked at her watch. We may have slept a little.

I was awake later when she got up to check the kiln's temperature gauge. "How's it going?" I asked.

"Fine," she said. "We're about half an hour away." I heard her shift on her blanket. Then she asked, "How's it going for you, John? What are your days like?"

I shifted onto my side and faced her voice in the dark. The sudden question surprised me. "Well," I said, "I work until early afternoon at easy tasks with people as different from me as I've ever known. I go home and make tea. Then I read or take a walk along the river. I go to bed early."

"God, John," she said. "It doesn't sound like you."

I barked out a little laugh that startled us both. "No, it doesn't sound like me, does it? Everything is such a surprise."

It was quiet for a minute.

"How are you feeling?" she asked.

Having her so near but invisible, hearing her familiar voice coming out of the pitch black as we sat on our two blankets as if on separate rafts, struck me as eerie and true. "I hardly know how to answer that," I said. I wondered if this was what it was like to sit in a confession box and talk back to the disembodied voice coming through the screen. I kept talking. I don't think I was trying for pity. I was just answering her question as accurately as I could. Finally I said, "I can't imagine the future and that scares me."

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We sat quietly in the dark. The gas jet hissed.

"I can't imagine the future right now, either," she said. "I try to sort things out, but I just draw a blank. I feel like there must be a key, but I can't find it."

I peered hard toward her, but it was like sitting in a cave—no light at all.

After a while Jamie said, "I think we can get that pot out," and she got up and went to the van to put on her protective clothes. I rolled the empty oil drum near the kiln, filled it with some of the shredded newspaper from the big plastic bags, and leaned the lid against the drum. Jamie came back and turned off the gas. "Okay," she said. I pulled on the padded gloves and stepped up to the detachable kiln door. I carefully lifted the door out of its stays and used it to shield my face from the heat as I took a couple of steps back.

Orange light poured out across the yard in a wide "V." In it, Jamie stepped forward with her leather apron tied on and her hair tucked up into the old leather pilot's helmet. Thick asbestos mitts reached above her elbows, and the clear plastic welder's visor that protected her face shone with the reflection of the glowing pot. I peered around my shield and felt the heat blast my forehead. In the kiln's yellow mouth, the big jar glowed red and shimmered, almost translucent, shining from the inside out like a Chinese lantern. Jamie reached in and grasped its curved sides and slowly drew it out. It glowed in her hands as she carried it at arm's length, carefully but quickly, like a newborn or a lit bomb, and nested it in the drum with the shredded newsprint. The paper ignited and flamed up, and Jamie covered the drum with its lid.

I stepped back and put down the metal door. We stood in the light of the glowing kiln bricks. "Well, that looked good," I said.

She tipped up her visor. "We'll see. Do you still have your eyebrows?"

"I think so," I said. "And you're not on fire, as far as I can tell." She smiled and we went inside to make tea while the kiln cooled for the next piece.

That was the pattern of the whole night. We did three more pots—big shallow bowls about six inches deep and over two feet

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across, decorative pieces for a low table or to hang on a wall. While they were in the kiln we rested and talked a little. After midnight when it became very cold we waited inside, napping with an alarm set for when the next piece would be ready to come out. I slept on the little couch in the main room. By the time the last piece came out it was dawn and bunched gray clouds were lit a soft peach color at their edges. While the last bowl was cooling we lined up the other pieces that were still covered with carbon char, pulled out the hose, and started to scrub them. First we worked on the shallow bowls. Both of them are handsome pieces, but I especially like the big covered jar.

It stands about two-and-a-half feet high, becoming wider as it rises until it curves gently into an almost round top. The shape is something like a hot-air balloon and the jar has the same appearance of buoyancy, as if it might lift and float. We cleaned the pot together, one on each side, both gripping its rim and scrubbing with the stiff brushes. It's remarkable that a piece so lyrical can be so tough. The walls that seemed almost transparent coming out of the kiln—all red and shimmering—were thick and heavy as we muscled the pot hard, scrubbing at the char. We knew this was a really good one, and we were excited as the colors began to show. The flat round cover and the wide band around the opening were done with a smooth cream glaze, so they came clean quickly. The smooth areas were crackled with little gray veins. The body of the jar had a coarse, pebbly finish the color of a lustered penny. As she had hoped, the raku process had introduced a lot of variety, with coppery greens and deep violets showing through in a muted iridescence. Her familiar willow pattern rose from the bottom of the jar, but with a variation. There were rectangles tumbled among the leaves, like floating windows that the leaf-shapes twined into and out of as they curved toward the jar's top.

When it was clean we sat back on our haunches, wet and chilly with the hose spatterings, and grinned at each other. We both knew it was a breakthrough piece for her. Then we went inside and ate a big breakfast of pancakes and eggs.

When we had finished, I needed to sleep before driving back to Delphi. Jamie told me to take her room where I could pull the shades. She went back outside to scrub the last bowl.

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Jamie's room was small and unadorned. The walls were a pale blue with nothing on them, except for the woolly tapestry hung over the head of the bed. It was the tapestry I had seen in the photo, and the same tall jar stood in one corner of the room. I pulled the shades, slipped off my shoes, and sat down on the edge of the bed. Jamie's hairbrushes were on the dresser across from me. Next to them was the small coral necklace that she usually wore, the one we found in Key West in the little shop near the fishing wharfs. I stretched out on top of the covers and shut my eyes. The pillow held the light scent of her perfume.

I couldn't sleep, felt vaguely restless. I sat up on the edge of the bed, facing Jamie's dresser. I could hear the water spattering on the concrete of the parking lot below the window as Jamie cleaned the last bowl. I reached over and pulled open the dresser's top drawer. Jamie's T-shirts and underwear were folded and stacked neatly. I lifted each shirt, searching between them. I sifted through the light underthings, the delicate sculpted lingerie in colors—the things I had bought for her—and the more practical, comfortable items she had bought herself. I felt behind and beside the clothes with both hands, looking for—I don't know what. I told myself that if I were to find something that could help me understand what was happening—a letter, more photos, anything—it would help us both. That's what I told myself as my heart beat in my ears so hard I felt dizzy.

I slid the drawer shut quietly and opened the next. Shorts, jeans, corduroys. I shut that drawer and opened the bottom one. Socks, stockings, the long knit nightgown she liked to wear, the short white gauzy one I liked her to wear. Underneath the clothes I found the familiar leather case. Inside, the antique jewelry inherited from her grandmother shone dully in the gloom. The tiger's eye earrings were there, the serpent bracelet, the pomegranate ring. I returned everything to its place and shut the drawer. When I straightened up I went light-headed and thought for a moment that I would pass out.

When I recovered I got up and stepped to the closet near the head of the bed. Inside, in the cool darkness, Jamie's scent hung in the blouses and dresses. I remember feeling ashamed, but I was helpless to stop myself. I put my arms around the

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clothes and pulled them to me. It was like embracing ghosts. I dropped my face into the light, cool fabric and sobbed. —Wyatt, my friend, my confessor, I think I am still not very well. — After a while I lay down on the bed again and instantly fell asleep.

Sometime later I heard footsteps and a light click. The bedroom door opened a little and Jamie stuck her head in. "Are you awake?" she said. "You told me you wanted to get home tonight, and it's late afternoon. I thought I'd check on you." The room was dim. A little sunlight leaked in around the edges of the drawn shades. I rolled onto my side. The hairbrushes and coral necklace sat on the dresser next to their images in the mirror.

"If you're hungry, there's some soup left from last night," she said. "Or we could order something."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll be out in a minute." Jamie pulled her head back and shut the door. I sat up on the edge of the bed. Across from me in the mirror I saw a man sitting in a darkened room. On either side of the mirror rectangles of light glowed in the narrow space between the shades and the window frames. I rubbed my face and looked again at my reflection, flat and indistinct in the half-light. It looked like a man cut out of paper and glued to a stick.

Jamie waved as I pulled out of the parking lot. In the rearview mirror I saw her wrap her sweater more tightly around her against the chill and turn away to go back inside. I followed the branching roads out of the city, recognizing the landmarks and turns, finding my way south toward the highway. It had rained and the roads were slick with reflections. Sunlight angled through the empty trees, and it was late enough that a few clouds were a deep delft blue. Somehow it reminded me of the day over a year ago when you and Alice helped us fit the last of the boxes into the van and waved as we started threading our way toward our new life out here. This time I couldn't tell if I was driving toward something or away from something.

John

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WENDELL BERRY

The Farm

Go by the narrow road
Along the creek, a burrow
Under shadowy trees
Such as a mouse makes through
Tall grass, so that you may
Forget the paved road you
Have left behind, and all
That it has led to. Or,
Best, walk up through the woods,
Around the valley rim,
And down to where the trees
Give way to cleared hillside,
So that you reach the place
Out of the trees' remembrance
Of their kind; seasonal
And timeless, they stand in
Uncounted time, and you
Have passed among them, small
As a mouse at a feast,
Unnoticed at the feet
Of all those mighty guests.
Come on a clear June morning
As the fog lifts, trees drip,
And birds make everywhere
Uninterrupted song.

However you may come,
You'll see it suddenly
Lie open to the light
Amid the woods: a farm
Little enough to see
Or call across—cornfield,

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Hayfield, and pasture, clear
As if remembered, dreamed
And yearned for long ago,
Neat as a blossom now
When all its fields are mowed
And dew is fresh upon it,
Bird music all around.
That is the vision, seen
As on a Sabbath walk:
The possibility
Of human life whose terms
Are Heaven's and this earth's.

Stay years if you would know
The work and thought, the pleasure
And grief, the feat, by which
This vision lives. In fall
Or winter you should plow
A patch of bottomland
For corn; the freezes then
Will work the heavy clods.
When it's too wet to plow,
Go to the woods to fell
Trees for next winter's fuel.
Take the inferior trees
And not all from one place,
So that the woods will yield
Without diminishment.
Then trim and rick the logs;
And when you drag them out
From woods to rick, use horses
Whose hooves are kinder to
The ground than wheels. In spring
The traces of your work
Will be invisible.

Near winter's end, your flock
Will bear their lambs, and you
Must be alert, out late

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And early at the barn,
To guard against the grief
You cannot help but feel
When any young thing made
For life falters at birth
And dies. Save the best hay
To feed the suckling ewes.
Shelter them in the barn
Until the grass is strong,
Then turn them out to graze
The green hillsides, good pasture
With shade and water close.
Then watch for dogs, whose sport
Will be to kill your sheep
And ruin all your work.
Or old Coyote may
Become your supper guest,
Unasked and without thanks;
He'll just excerpt a lamb
And dine before you know it.
But don't, because of that,
Make war against the world
And its wild appetites.
A guard dog or a donkey
Would be the proper answer;
Or use electric fence.
For you must learn to live
With neighbors never chosen
As with the ones you chose.
Coyote's song at midnight
Says something for the world
The world wants said. And when
You know your flock is safe
You'll like to wake and hear
That wild voice sing itself
Free in the dark, at home.

As the fields dry, complete
Your plowing; you must do this

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As early as you can.
Then disk and drag the furrows.
And now the past must come
To serve the future: dung
And straw from the barn floor
You carry to the fields,
Load after load until
The barns are clean, the cropland
All covered with manure.
In early May, prepare
The corn ground, plant the corn.
And now you are committed.
Wait for the seed to sprout,
The green shoots, tightly rolled,
To show above the ground
As risen from the grave.
Then you must cultivate
To keep them free of weeds
Until they have grown tall
And can defend themselves.

Where you grew corn last year,
Sow buckwheat, let it seed,
Then disk it in and grow
A second crop to disk in.
This is for humus, and
To keep out weeds. It is
A Sabbath for the land,
Rest and enrichment, good
For it, for you, for all
The ones who're yet unborn;
The land must have its Sabbath
Or take it when we starve.
The ground is mellow now,
Friable and porous: rich.
Mid-August is the time
To sow this field in clover
And grass, to cut for hay
Two years, pasture a while,

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And then return to corn.
But don't neglect your garden.
Household economy
Makes family and land
An independent state.
Never buy at a store
What you can grow or find
At home—this is the rule
Of liberty, also
Of neighborhood. (And be
Faithful to local merchants
Too. Never buy far off
What you can buy near home.)
As early as you can,
Plant peas, onions, and greens,
Potatoes, radishes,
Cabbage and cauliflower,
Lettuce, carrots, and beets—
Things that will stand the frost.
Then as the weather warms
Plant squashes, corn, and beans,
Okra, tomatoes, herbs,
Flowers—some for yourself
And some to give away.
In the cornfield plant pole beans,
Pumpkins, and winter squash;
Thus by diversity
You can enlarge the yield.

You have good grass and hay,
So keep a cow or two.
Milk made from your own grass
Is cheap and sweet. A cow
To milk's a good excuse
To bring you home from places
You do not want to be.
Fatten the annual calf
For slaughter. Keep a pig
To rescue scraps, skimmed milk,

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And other surpluses.
Keep hens who will make eggs
And meat of offal, insects,
A little of your corn.
Eat these good beasts that eat
What you can't eat. Be thankful
To them and to the plants,
To your small, fertile homeland,
To topsoil, light, and rain
That make you what you are.

Be thankful and repay
Growth with good work and care.
Work done in gratitude,
Kindly, and well, is prayer.
You did not make yourself,
Yet you must keep yourself
By use of other lives.
No gratitude atones
For bad use or too much.

This is not work for hire.
By this expenditure
You make yourself a place;
You make yourself a way
For love to reach the ground.
In its ambition and
Its greed, its violence,
The world is turned against
This possibility,
And yet the world survives
By the survival of
This kindly working love.

And while you work your fields
Do not forget the woods.
The woods stands by the field
To measure it, and teach
Its keeper. Nature is

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The best farmer, for she
Preserves the land, conserves
The rain; she deepens soil,
Wastes nothing; and she is
Diverse and orderly.
She is our mother, teacher,
And final judge on earth.
The farm's a human order
Opening among the trees,
Remembering the woods.
To farm, live like a tree
That does not grow beyond
The power of its place.
A tree stands in its place
And rises by the strength
Of local soil and light,
Aspiring to no height
That it has not attained.
More time, more light, more rain
Will make it grow again
Till it has realized
All that it can become,
And then it dies into
More life, deserving more
By not desiring more.

The year's first fullness comes
To the hayfields. In May,
Watching the sky, you mow
Your fields before the grass
Toughens and while the clover
Stands in its early bloom.
But weather's iffy here
In May, and in these close
And humid valleys, hay
Is hard to cure. Some rain
Will fall on swath or windrow,
As like as not, to darken
The hay. "It beats a snowball,"

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You say then to console
Yourself, and look ahead
To later cuttings, lighter,
Better, quicker to cure.
In summer, thus, you think
Of winter, load the barns
In heat against the cold,
The January days
When you'll go out to feed,
Your breath a little cloud,
The blue air glittery
With frost. On the tracked snow
On ground that's frozen hard
You free the smell of summer
From bales of hay thrown down
Before the hungry stock.

Soon you have salad greens
Out of the garden rows,
Then peas, early potatoes,
Onions, beets, beans, sweet corn.
The bounty of the year
Now comes in like a tide:
Yellow summer squashes,
Pole beans from the cornfield,
Tomatoes, okra, eggplant,
Cabbage and cauliflower.
Eat, and give to the neighbors;
Preserve for wintertime;
Plant more, and fight the weeds.
Later will come the fall crops:
Turnips, parsnips, more greens,
The winter squashes, cushaws,
And pumpkins big as tubs.
"Too much for us," you'll say,
and give some more away—
Or try to; nowadays,
A lot of people would
Rather work hard to buy

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Their food already cooked
Than get it free by work.
Best of all is the fruit,
Sweetest and prettiest:
The strawberries and cherries,
The gooseberries and currants,
Raspberries and blackberries
(The best are wild), grapes, pears,
Apples early and late—
These gleamings in the sun
That gleam upon the tongue
And gleam put up in jars
And gleam within the mind.

Of all your harvests, those
Are pleasantest that come
Freest: Blackberries from
Wild fencerows; strawberries
You happen on in crossing
The green hillsides in June;
Wild cherries and wild grapes,
Sour at first taste, then sweet;
Persimmons and blackhaws
That you pick up to eat
On days you walk among
The red and yellow leaves;
And walnuts, hickory nuts
Gathered beneath the trees.
In your wild foragings
The earth feeds you the way
She feed the beasts and birds.

And all the summer long
You're putting up more hay:
You clip the pastures, keep
The fences up, repair
Your buildings, milk your cows;
You wean the lambs; you move
The livestock to new grass;

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And you must walk the fields
With hoe in hand, to cut
The thistles and the docks.
There is no end to work—
Work done in pleasure, grief,
Or weariness, with ease
Of skill and timeliness,
Or awkardly or wrong,
Too hurried or too slow.
One job completed shows
Another to be done.
And so you make the farm
That must be daily made
And yearly made, or it
Will not exist. If you
Should go and not return
And none should follow you,
This clarity would be
As if it never was.
But praise, in knowing this,
The Genius of the place,
Whose way forgives your own,
And will resume again
In time, if left alone.
You work always in this
Dear opening between
What was and is to be.

And so you make the farm,
And so you disappear
Into your days, your days
Into the ground. Before
You start each day, the place
Is as it is, and at
The day's end, it is as
It is, a little changed
By work, but still itself,
Having included you
And everything you've done.

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And it is who you are,
And you are what it is.
You will work many days
No one will ever see;
Their record is the place.
This way you come to know
That something moves in time
That time does not contain.
For by this timely work
You keep yourself alive
As you came into time,
And as you'll leave: God's dust,
God's breath, a little Light.

To rest, go to the woods
Where what is made is made
Without your thought or work.
Sit down; begin the wait
For small trees to grow big,
Feeding on earth and light.
Their good result is song
The winds must bring, that trees
Must wait to sing, and sing
Longer than you can wait.
Soon you must go. The trees,
Your seniors, standing thus
Acknowledged in your eyes,
Stand as your praise and prayer.
Your rest is in this praise
Of what you cannot be
And what you cannot do.
But make your land recall,
In workdays of the fields,
The Sabbath of the woods.
Although your fields must bear
The barbed seed of the Fall,
Though nations yet make war
For madness and for hire,
By work in harmony

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With the God-given world
You bring your days to rest,
Remain a living soul.
In time of hate and waste,
Wars and rumors of wars,
Rich armies and poor peace,
Your blessed economy,
Beloved sufficiency
Upon a dear, small place,
Sings with the morning stars.

Autumn ripens the corn.
You pick the yellow ears,
Carry them from the field,
Rich, satisfying loads.
The garden's final yield
Now harvested, the ground
Worked and manured, prepared
For spring, put out of mind,
You must saw, split, bring in,
And store your winter wood.
And thus the year comes round.

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PATRICIA MEYER SPACKS

Scientific Grandiosities

Scientists think and do things that the rest of us—stockbrokers, lawyers, shoemakers, professional intellectuals—don't even begin to comprehend. Freud and Marx transformed the self-imaginings of Western culture, but Einstein transformed our universe. To the priesthood of science accrue myths of power, knowledge, and sanctity. A scientist accused of falsifying data makes the front page of the *New York Times*. Cheating on Wall Street belongs to the nature of things; cheating in the laboratory threatens awe-inspiring consequences.

Given the high and mysterious status of science, challengers from outside its disciplines face a difficult task. Two recent books by outsiders, a historian and a moral philosopher, find ingenious strategies of interrogation, yielding provocative if not altogether conclusive or persuasive results.

Mary Midgley, the moral philosopher, taking an emperor's-new-clothes view, examines closely the language and the import of certain statements by late-twentieth-century scientists, suggesting that to a shocking degree personal and collective fantasy shapes ideas presented as serious statements of possibility.[1] She herself writes aggressively—and to my taste irritatingly—"popular" prose: "Science really is a wonderful thing, and human beings really are wonderful creatures. . . . The true value of science is something that is only insulted by tagging it with the offer of pie in the sky." Short sentences, simple diction, hackneyed metaphors, two-page treatments of complex concepts, often fatuous ideas, an insistent common-sensical tone: one suspects dangerous simplification. Yet Midgley has something important to say. Like David Noble, she presses on the metaphor of science as priesthood, considering both the nature

[1] SCIENCE AS SALVATION: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning, by *Mary Midgley*. Routledge. $25.00.

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of scientists' claims to offer salvation and the kinds of faith in scientific salvation widespread in the populace. She raises disturbing questions.

Stephen Hawking provides an early case in point for Midgley's contention that scientists dangerously exaggerate their discipline's potential for enlightenment. He suggests that science will eventually reveal "why it is that we and the universe exist," that we will come through science "to know the mind of God." Midgley inquires *how* science can engage the question "why" in cosmic terms and what Hawking means by "the mind of God." Presumably he intends something metaphorical, but he elucidates neither the metaphor's term nor its reference. He exemplifies how teleology creeps into the discourse even of those who disclaim its relevance.

Midgley herself has a predilection for teleology, and she believes that the universe comprises an orderly scheme. She observes that scientists often fail to acknowledge or even to recognize their own assumptions and that they tend to evade commitment about how their disciplines relate to other ways of thinking or to problems larger than scientific. In the past, she maintains, scientists took more straightforward positions about the significance of what they do. Now they characteristically allege, at one extreme, that science concerns itself simply with information-gathering, "significance" an irrelevant issue. At the other extreme, they offer prophecies about "future man," a being defined purely by his intellect, who will dominate and control the physical universe.

Even the minimalist claims of science, Midgley rightly points out, imply a foundation of "faith." One cannot persistently accumulate information without some conviction that information possesses value. Contemporary scientists, however, have separated this belief from the faith that once informed it: faith in the wonder of the physical world and its testimony to the existence of a creator. Faith in man, as a being able to *know*, has replaced faith in God. Midgley skillfully demonstrates the logical elisions characterizing the thought of such writers as Jacques Monod, who declares the universe a structure dictated by chance and affirms the scientist's existential position as solitary quester in a meaningless cosmos. She also shows the overwhelming arrogance of such a view. "Jacques Monod," she

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writes, "referring especially to our weakness for ideas that attribute any sort of purpose to nature, contrasts the heroic stance of intellectual ascetics like himself with other people's inert conventionalism." She then quotes Monod on the "austere, abstract, proud ethic" of those able to rise above the illusion of purpose and characterizes his rhetoric as "virile posturing."

The adjective *virile* calls attention to gender issues sometimes submerged, sometimes explicit in this study. The world of science is a man's world. Noble's historical investigation reveals the literal truth of this assertion; Midgley concerns herself partly with its metaphoric truth. Feminists before her have called attention to the extraordinarily sexual language of seventeenth-century scientists, who wrote of Nature "as a seductive but troublesome female, to be unrelentingly pursued, sought out, . . . wooed, harried, vexed, tormented, . . . her 'beautiful bosom' must be laid bare, she must be . . . 'penetrated,' 'pierced,' and 'vanquished.'" Francis Bacon notoriously yearned for the "truly masculine birth of time," in which scientists might enslave Nature and all her children. Such language, in Midgley's view, reflects the felt uncertainty of male domination in a period of political stress and increasing individualism. "It was no longer enough for the rational male principle to be seen as the source of all order. He must now be altogether omnipotent."

Midgley does not explicitly pursue the question of male omnipotence, but her concluding investigation of "anthropism" may recall it to the reader's mind. The notion of anthropism reworks the view that man is the measure of all things. Now scientists—some scientists—argue that the universe exists only because man has observed it. J. A. Wheeler claims that the concept of observation as the source of the universe has comparable importance to Einstein's theories. John D. Barrow and Frank R. Tripler, authors of a work entitled *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, who accept the notion that "observers" have brought into being this improbable universe, believe also that human life will extend indefinitely, in time and space. Well, not exactly *human* life, in the ordinary sense. Our great-great-grandchildren will be machines. After all, human beings in essence constitute computers; only narrow-mindedness could

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prevent us from imagining self-sufficient computers of the projected future as essentially our descendants.

This is not the only extraordinary vision of the future that Midgley cites. She summarizes also, for instance, Freeman Dyson's elaborate fantasies of space travel (if a planet proves inhospitable, the human body will simply—magically—adapt to it). She quotes Dyson apparently accepting as literal possibilities Fred Hoyle's fiction of a "black cloud" containing all surviving life and Karl Capek's robots of the future. She repeats Paul Davies' explicit claim that science offers a direct path to God. Again and again she demonstrates how physicists have appropriated metaphysical questions and provided answers for them without taking cognizance of several centuries' thought by non-physicists about the same questions. They understand intellect, she concludes, as the only significant human component—and they appear to consider it the unique property of physicists, to whom the future will belong.

Male physicists, it seems. The fantasies of space travel and transmutation have something in common with the vision of seventeenth-century scientists, who likewise dreamed of dominating the universe. None of the dreamers is female. In the grandiosity as in the myopia of their imagining of immortality, control, triumph, these latter-day visionaries like their predecessors disclose a potent and unsettling myth of male sovereignty.

Midgley demonstrates her acuity in her analyses of the diction employed by men who believe themselves to deal in facts but betray in their language their reliance on unacknowledged myths. Not all her assertions, however, have comparable authority. Her breezy tone and her consistent appeals to "common sense" enable her to avoid full intellectual engagement with the complex issues she raises. Her appalling ignorance about Freud makes one wonder about the range of her knowledge. (She alleges that Freud attached fixed symbolic meanings to objects, pen always standing for penis, bag for womb, but that he never inquired about the meaning of penis and womb; later she suggests that "in the United States" people seek salvation through Freudian analysis, but that Freudian ideas possess no intellectual power.) More troubling still, she offers no indication of how intellectually representative her

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quotations from physicists are. Freeman Dyson and Stephen Hawking are respectable names known even to nonscientific readers, but it is difficult to tell whether their wilder utterances in fact characterize physicists as a class. How solid an opponent does Midgley confront? It's hard to tell.

Nonetheless, to read the words of a woman casting a cold eye on male nonsense in areas where women seldom venture has a wonderfully refreshing effect.

David Noble's book is less refreshing but more solidly informative.[2] Confronting the question of how it has happened that the disciplines of science long excluded women, Noble produces a straightforward, if necessarily superficial (considering its chronological and disciplinary scope), history of Western science and theology from the beginnings of Christianity to the present. He demonstrates that the rejection of women from science does not derive from any simple continuous practice of patriarchy, nor has it been altogether consistent through the centuries. It registers the outcome of a series of intricate and energetic contests for hegemony.

The story of *A World without Women* begins with, and frequently recurs to, the church. Its narrative line goes something like this: In its early years, Christianity provided intellectual and political opportunities for women as well as men. Before the tenth century, both genders participated comparably in great centers of learning. Double monasteries, occupied simultaneously by men and women, abounded throughout Europe. (The founder of the abbey that became Ely Cathedral was a woman, as were the next three heads of the institution.) Members of such monasteries practiced celibacy for positive rather than negative reasons: endeavoring not to master sinful sexuality but to achieve a new androgyny, neither male nor female, simultaneously male and female. For those within the double monasteries, but also for many men and women outside them, it seemed possible to fulfill an ideal of spiritual companionship between the sexes.

Other opportunities presented themselves to pious women living secular lives. In most European countries, women had

[2] A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN: The Christian Clerical Culture of Western Science, by *David F. Noble.* Knopf. $25.00.

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more control of money than they would have in later centuries. Prosperous widows might become patrons of individual bishops, for instance, and thus exercise influence on the church. Women could also employ more direct channels of influence: many clergymen married, before or after entering the priesthood. Property, and even certain bishoprics, passed within the church from father to son.

But counter-trends quickly developed. As early as the second century, the church tried to establish the notion of apostolic succession and to articulate the idea of significant difference between those within and outside the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The ideal of clerical celibacy provided one important mode of differentiation, signifying the priest's purity, which implied rejection and exclusion of evil: evil embodied more and more frequently in imaginings of the female. More refined notions of orthodoxy, with their increasingly detailed specifications for clerical conduct, implied the possibility of heterodoxy, and denunciation of newly-defined categories of "heretic"—including those who lived chastely in order to transcend gender—flourished. Forbidden to perform quasi-priestly functions that had earlier been allowed them, women, relegated to the church's margins, no longer figured positively in the ecclesiastical scheme of things. Church organization became increasingly militaristic. Charlemagne understood the clergy as his political instruments and adjuncts, like his army: a unified, instrumental, masculine assembly. His son, Louis the Pious, banished women from the court. By the time of Charlemagne's grandson, a philosopher could write that at the Resurrection, "sex will be abolished and nature made one. . . . There will then be only man, as if he had never sinned." Noble cites Georges Duby's elucidation of these sentences: "the end of the world would do away with dual sexuality, or, more precisely, with the female part of it. When the heavens opened in glory, femininity, that imperfection, that stain on the purity of creation, would be no more."

Until the tenth century, double monasteries and married clergy co-existed with celibate, misogynistic groups of churchmen. Indeed, the ninth century saw a brief resurgence of female power within the church. A hundred years later, rigorous reform movements had swept Europe, defining Christian-

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ity firmly as a religion governed by and existing for males, with a set of principles that long survived.

All of this may appear to bear little connection to science. Noble argues, however, that science "was always in essence a religious calling, more a continuation of than a departure from Christian tradition." He adds immediately that it might constitute either "a clerical expression of the established church or a vehicle of lay rebellion." To consider "lay rebellion" a version of "Christian tradition" rather stretches ordinary categories of understanding, and indeed even the fairly cavalier history of scientific development here provided suggests that scientists from the beginning operated often in devious if not antagonistic relation to orthodoxy. Their inclusions and exclusions of women, however, followed patterns of oscillation comparable to those of the church. Initially, science developed in the universities: "an exclusively male—and celibate, homosocial, and misogynous—culture." As Italian universities allowed more lay influence, a few exceptional women began to participate in the activities of learning and teaching. Renaissance humanists concerned themselves with female education, always within the context of assumed subordination. The alchemists interested themselves in the "feminine" in order to appropriate it. As the hermetic intellectual tradition developed, however, it allied itself increasingly with popular magic, practiced importantly by women. The Reformation, and the religious reforms that had preceded it, allowed important places for women, as pastors' wives and as prophets and preachers. The hermetic and humanist movements, and the accompanying religious revivals, challenged clerical culture and welcomed at least a few women into "the mainstream of Western thought."

Their moment of participation was brief. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, women were linked to heresy and "witches" faced persecution throughout Europe. In the late sixteenth century, the murder of women reached such heights that two French villages were left with only two women each. The church, denouncing alchemical heresy and female "enthusiasm," supported "doctrinally sound scientific inquiry," which took place in societies of males. By the seventeenth century, a series of important male scientists had articulated mechanistic theories, understood to support the order of church and state

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and to oppose the intellectual looseness of heresy. The first secretary of the British Royal Society, founded in 1660, proclaimed the society's purpose as "to raise a Masculine Philosophy . . . whereby the Mind of Man may be ennobled with the knowledge of Solid Truths." *Masculine* had become a definitive—if rarely defined—term of value.

Only in the nineteenth century did women begin to find a significant place in colleges and universities and to enjoy the benefits of serious scientific education. The increasing professionalism of science, however, tended to marginalize them. "As professional scientists legitimized themselves as society's sole authorities in the understanding of life, nature, and the cosmos (and a now largely unspoken God), they assumed the 'clerical' mantle of secular society." They continued to prefer an intellectual world without women. Noble tells of an 1880 "Misogynist Dinner of the American Chemical Society," at which a group of distinguished scientists enjoyed jokes and songs at women's expense, one song beginning, "There are many devils that walk this world" and ending, "But a laughing woman with two bright eyes / is the *Worst Devil of All.*" In the late twentieth century, no such event would be likely, but the testimony of today's women scientists, according to this book, reports continued experience of near-ostracism by their male colleagues. The effort to preserve science as a realm of masculine culture continues.

Virtually all the data of this information-packed history come from secondary sources, a fact that contributes to its stylistic insufficiencies. (One paragraph contains five different citations, each with an introductory phrase in the same form: As X says . . . [alleges, writes, explains . . .].) Noble acknowledges his reliance on previous historians, justifying it by the chronological scope of his enterprise and by its foundation in questions "rarely posed, much less answered." But in fact he never answers or even recognizes the really hard questions implicit in his undertaking. He does not actually explain why science tends to exclude women: he only documents how consistently it has done so. Why science more than other originally male disciplines—more, say, than the church itself? The Catholic church continues to forbid women the priesthood and to demand celibate priests, but the supply of potential priests has dwindled

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alarmingly, and scandals about pederasty raise questions about celibacy's meaning within the priesthood. Meanwhile, Protestant denominations welcome women to the pulpit and to various kinds of ecclesiastical activity. Historical origins explain little. Indeed, Noble tells a story of branching paths, of moments when rejection of "femininity" weakens and women find opportunities for obvious intellectual action. Why is it that such moments have never lasted long? Is there something in the nature of science as intellectual activity that makes workers in the field particularly hostile to the female?

Phenomena that look the same do not necessarily share a single meaning. The burning of witches and the singing of songs about women as devils obviously have something in common. But can we assume that the same causes account for both, that the reasons for mortal and "comic" antipathy to women are identical? Misogyny in its various shapes always speaks of men's fear and hatred of the Other. Does that fear and hatred derive from a single ground, despite all cultural change between the first and the twentieth centuries? If so, surely the ground requires mapping. (Noble offers not even a sketch.) If not, the reader yearns for clarifying distinctions.

The lack of such distinctions constitutes the most glaring weakness of *A World without Women.* The book interprets all evidence in singularly literal fashion. For instance, it cites Molière's ridicule in *Les Femmes savantes* of women's intellectual pretensions as testimony to the systematic exclusion of the female from male enclaves of endeavor. Surely such satire demands more intricate exegesis. If it indicates that men don't want women to encroach on their intellectual domain, it also strongly suggests that women in fact were doing precisely that. Otherwise, what need for attack? Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, complained about the lack of audience for her discoveries in "natural philosophy"; Noble sees in the complaint evidence of male oppression and suppression. Quite right: but he might equally well have taken the Duchess' statements as evidence of the fact that women actually performed scientific investigations, if only in private.

Noble does not, however, consider the possibility of a private female discourse and practice of science any more than he thinks about the implications of science's constant claims of

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public meaning in their bearing on female involvement. And he has trouble with the very idea of causality when he (occasionally) examines specific cases. Thus he quotes another historian who says, of Isaac Newton, "the specific social and political environment in which he lived—with its tremendous anxiety over radical political and religious movements—[encouraged] Newton to hide some of his most important ideas." Noble adds, "That same anxiety encouraged him to stay away from women." He offers no supporting evidence. On the contrary, he goes on to suggest that Newton's early abandonment by his mother contributed to his distrust of women, that his thirty years in the all-male environment of Cambridge University played an important part in determining his proclivities, and that he felt a "strong personal identification with the [celibate] Paracelsian magi." Any or all of these may have caused Newton "to stay away from women." None has any obvious bearing on contemporary anxiety over radical political and religious movements.

Such carping aside, it must be said that Noble's accumulated data are rich in interest. The facts themselves are extraordinary: the repeated gatherings of male force to repel the female specifically from the realms of science and theology. One might speculate endlessly about the import of those facts, and Noble can hardly be blamed for coming to no definitive conclusions. He *can*, on the other hand, be appropriately blamed for his apparent failure to understand the problems inherent in his own presentation.

In conjunction, the two books at hand arouse speculation about what difference it might have made if women had played more important roles in the development of science. Would grandiose fantasies of the future diminish, given a larger female presence? Would physics assume a less dominant place among the sciences? The dust jacket of *A World without Women* displays an artfully retouched photograph of a Dürer *Adam and Eve* from which Eve is missing. The blossom that substituted for fig leaf in the original painting remains, however, along with the apple, both apparently suspended in midair. Adam gazes with a puzzled expression at these symbols of female sexuality and knowledge. What power might they have? What could he possibly do with them?

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ROBERT McDOWELL

The Pact

Rain bulled into the valley like a giant
Escaping from the pages of a book.
John-Allen in his garden watched it brawling
Over the coastal range. Its highest peaks
Gleamed briefly in the sun that broke above
The Cascade Mountains fifty miles to the east,
Then disappeared in swirling thunderheads.
Behind him his blue house reflected deeper blue
As all the valley darkened, and the wind
Coming in warm gusts that flattened the grass,
Advanced on the pear tree, then on himself.
His straw hat blew off, flew crazily away,
Splitting the wicket of two apple trees
Before hanging up suddenly among the roses.
John-Allen still faced west, his hair straight back,
His eyes tearing. He knew he should go in
But tightened his grip on the fence. The storm inside
Would outlast this one, which was beautiful.
A moment's silence, then thunder came calling,
Then all the fury of the storm broke loose.

John-Allen let the rain wet down his face.
He saw the dust on leathery leaves explode,
A grasshopper dive for cover in the grass.
He heard the plastic pinging on raised beds,
And saw her at the back door, under the awning,
Looking out for him, or admiring the storm.
He didn't know which, or care, he told himself.
It hurt to look at her, to get up close.
She stepped aside, her eyes still on the storm.
John-Allen stopped, as if to go in alone
Meant he would lose her for good.

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Already lost,
He thought. He wanted her to go, and stay.
The rain he tromped in stained the worn fir floor.
He hung his slicker up. "Your packing done?"
She sighed, but only the storm would answer him.
He stared into the coil of yellow hair
She always bunched and pinned when she was working,
He could still smell the perfume in it.
His head grew light. He grabbed the door for balance.
It's then she looked at him.
"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," he said. "Just got the jelly legs.
This rain has given me a chill," he lied.

She turned back in, their bodies almost touching,
His shoulder leaning toward her, but obstinate.

"Come in. The fire's stoked, the kettle's on."

His body tingled, polished and alert
From where she touched his arm above the elbow.
He stepped out of his boots and toweled off.
She poured out tea. He trembled as he drank.

"You're shaking," she said, as one might say *you're fine*,
Mixing reassurance with the fact.
He forced another swallow, burning his tongue,
Insisted he'd be all right with a change of clothes.
"I'll get them for you."
"No, don't bother," he said.

Upstairs he found her suitcase on the bed,
Still open, as if weighing in the balance.
Her folded flannel nightgown, lying on top,
Distressed John-Allen so his breath got short.
He reached for the inhaler and sat down;
One shot and he was breathing easier.
He touched the nightgown, tracing with his finger

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The pattern of embroidery at the neck.
He put his face to it and breathed her in,
Then started at the imagined scent of hay
Turning his reluctant mind to memory,

To the night he pulled in early, noticing
The burned out light, the darkness on the porch,
The darker stillness of the house, its calm
Unbroken by his calling Sarah's name.
He unpacked paper, put away his clothes,
And sat up hours beside the telephone.
At two he went to bed, the cat at his feet.
Near dawn the crunch of gravel woke him up.
He listened to the key click into place,
The door creaking on its hinges, then clapping shut.
John-Allen at the window saw the truck,
The driver hesitating, then moving on
While up the stairs behind him she appeared.
In Sarah's face he saw a story's end.
He saw the blood-shot eyes above the circles,
The pale skin even lighter than it was
When she was rested. Her eyes told everything.

"You're early." (Sarah began with the obvious.)
He stood his ground, endured the flash of options,
The swift steps closing the distance between them,
His hand, as if another's, flaring up
And sparking in its fury as it crashed
Into her upturned, unresisting face.
He could see her body tense to take the blow,
Her nerves all bunched together to absorb
His rage should it break free and burn through her.
Denying the release of a moment's violence,
John-Allen said no word. Her face grew crimped
And even paler; her straining body sagged.
That gave him satisfaction. He almost smiled,
Then felt like weeping for the sickness in it.

In a moment she came downstairs after him,

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Trying to brook the awful awkwardness
Between them with a flurry of routine,
But as the coffee beans ground down, his question
Vibrated in her as if she were a bell.
"How long?" was all he said, not *who,* or *why.*

A knot of raw emotions writhed in her—
Amusement, anger, defiance, even remorse—
Then broke out in a rush of laughing tears.
John-Allen waited for the fit to pass
And stared out at the field where a cloud of birds
Descended, ravenous, pecking the ground
Then swarming up en masse and moving on.
He thought them lucky, all of a single mind,
And knew no humans could ever live like that.
Now Sarah had calmed herself he studied her,
The way she jabbed at her eyes with a paper towel
And wiped her reddening nose, stuffed up and swollen.
He pitied her, then steeled himself against it.
They sat down with their coffee, studied their cups,
Their talk taking shape reluctantly at first
Then shifting back and forth between two poles—
One brimming with aggression, the other restrained.

Inside them there were voices talking, too.
John-Allen's needled him:
What'll you do?
You could kill the lover, your wife, even yourself;
You could even stay with her, or go on alone.

But how? The thought of starting over ached,
Forgiveness seemed a saintly, distant thing
Beyond his reach.
The woman wrestled, too,
With what her private voice was telling her.

Before he knew, just one long day ago,
You had a secret life that was your own.
That's all behind you, but give this man the boot

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And get down the road you started on.
Or stay here if you can. You love each other,
You've built this house, you share some history.

"We built this place," she said, as if prompted to speak.
"If you don't talk, if you won't help me now,
I'll have to make out on my own what you mean.
Please look at me!" She shook him by the shoulder
Surprising him with her strength. Like one asleep
John-Allen moved. The subtlest counter-pressure
Was enough to render each one motionless.
But still he did not speak.
"I can't explain,"
She said, "why I went out behind your back.
The boy's no older than my younger brother,
Not yet a man. He acted so clumsy at first,
But he kept me company. He helped me out
Those six weeks you were out in Idaho.
Why did we cross the line? I can't be sure.
I guess I felt—I don't mean to sting you
By saying this—as if I were on vacation,
As if we were taking a break from all this . . . *life*
We've put together. It didn't mean I quit.
I'll tell you, John, the shine came back to us
The more I saw us from far away. It's then
I knew I loved you as I always had.
Now tell me if that means we can't go on."

The sun came up, squeezing the chill from the air.
By noon a yellow haze distorted the light
As seed grass farmers scorched their acreage.
The cows in Frazier's field roamed far to graze,
Then ambled back to the sheds by four o'clock.
A good burn day, they called it in the valley,
A day to stay indoors. John-Allen and Sarah
Had nowhere else to go. They sat talking together,
Reaching the point where nothing new came up,
But neither wished to put an end to talk
For fear that if they stopped they'd never start.

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Not far from there the lover wired himself
On bitter truckstop coffee. Sharp pains attacked
His spine so often he couldn't keep track of them.
He worried that his heart, erratic since birth,
Might jumble its complex messages and stop.
All day he trembled back and forth between
His seat and the pay phone by the register.
His coins exploded on the metal tray,
Provoking a glare from the girl behind the counter.
Each time she settled into a hostile boredom
Broken only by curt efficiency
When someone slapped a ticket on the glass.
The sounds of talk and eating buzzed in his mind,
And no call he made got through, not to his boss
To say that he would not be in to work,
Not to his mother, who dozed on beer in her hammock,
Or to Sarah, whose line was busy or off the hook.
He thought of her denying both of them
(A young man's fear of betrayal is like no other's).
He wanted to confess, confide in someone,
But being true he'd kept this to himself.
Had Sarah named him? Her husband might be driving
To call him out, expose him to these people.
He shivered at that, then cursed the man who living
Denied the boy his only happiness.
In time he wished John-Allen *would* appear.
A bit past five the dinner crowd began
To straggle in—Farmers mostly, eating alone,
Or in twos or threes, a few with families.
These last ones hurt the most.
Too many people,
The boy decided. Were they watching him,
Some even laughing at his foolishness?
He paid his check and drove his truck due east
To the winding gravel spur of Enos Lane,
Which led him to just a field away from her—
Her property, at least—or was it the man's?
He'd never asked.
The valley smoke had settled
By dusk, though some black flakes of ash still floated

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Like apple or cherry blossoms on gusts of air.
One landed on his shoulder—a star? An omen?
But he was much too literal for that.
He kept to the line of scrub oak, disturbing sheep
That feasted in the shade of the blackberry thicket.
He willed his cough away as he drew near
The barn's back door. It opened soundlessly.
He stepped inside involuntarily thrilled,
Imagining that Sarah was waiting there
To stun him with a look of mock surprise
Then move up close, inviting him to touch.
The smell of her hair, the feel of her moist skin
Beneath the summer dress that fell away
So easily, his own clothes slipping off—

But that was over now. The sick light splashed
across the sagging floor, and no one came.
The boy stood swaying from the shock of loneliness;
He shut his eyes, attempting to calm down.
He knelt by the tractor, picking apart an owl pellet.
A starling's indigestible beak and bones
Repulsed and fascinated him. If only
He had made the difficult connection there,
That all life turns on bursts and fits of passion
Leaving behind a clump of broken bones,
A slimy trail, a smear on a patch of earth.
He was wounded, though still too inexperienced
To know all stains are beautiful, sure signs
That life has happened.
But the boy could only wish
That Sarah would find him there. Yet she'd promised nothing
(How could she? They had so little to talk about),
And kneeling on the floor of hardened dung
He cursed her quietly, then took it back,
His mind refusing to cooperate
With slandering her when all it anchored on
Were images of love. He pitied her,
But much more himself, and peered through slats at the house.
He thought of rushing in to rescue her,
Then heard again her voice admonishing:

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Whatever happens, you cannot interfere.

Did she know her command had circumscribed his life,
That he'd take her at her word? His future closed.
The hackamore fell softly over the beam
Above his head, the noose efficiently tightened.
The body, calming, swung so rhythmically
An animal watching might easily fall asleep.

It was after dusk when he rolled the huge doors back
And held his breath at the slow revolving motion
Of the body above. He heaved the poor boy down
And checked his pulse, though he knew death when he saw it.
He knew the boy, yet in his shock he missed
The obvious connection, the steps behind him.
Then Sarah's moaning covered all of them—
The solid, hardened man above the boy,
Herself keening in sickly afterlight.
John-Allen laid the corpse on a bed of hay
And firmly pressured Sarah from the barn.

Later, they talked in the frightened voices of children.
By midnight they had calmed their nerves with drink.
All night they sat together or paced their rooms
Measuring what to do. Should they call police?
They'd have to leave the valley, and it would ruin
The dead boy's memory; his mother would break,
The locals would be cruel.
Toward sun-up he said,
"It's our affair, or I should say it's been yours.
I'm game to keep it here, but you should go.
We'll say you've gone back east to see your people.
Folks will gossip, wondering where you are,
But that'll pass. In time they'll just ignore it."

"But what about now?" Sarah's voice was thin.
He knew she meant the body in the barn.

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"We'll lay him down in the addition," he said,
"Back by the window. We're ready to pour a slab.
I'll dig. You can read the Scriptures over him."

She stood as if on cue and got the Book.
John-Allen fetched his gloves, his knee-high boots,
And single file they marched to the gloomy barn
Where they made quick work of it. With an owl as witness
John-Allen gently laid the dead boy down.
Removing his cap and gloves, he bowed his head
And listened fiercely to the 23rd Psalm.

The next day's weather broke out cold and clear.
A midnight wind had gusted through the pass,
Pushing the field smoke north to Washington.
On other days like this they'd feel refreshed,
The valley clean, themselves primed for renewal,
But today bore all the weight of what they'd done.
As Sarah scrambled eggs that neither would eat,
John-Allen stared out at the fields and barn,
The coffee getting colder in his mug.
I'll stay with you . . . her words kept playing him,
But to what march? The blind steps of a fool?
He struggled with his pride, despising Sarah
And hating himself for not forgiving her.
The things she'd done, the betrayal, her selfishness,
The things she still might do he had survived,
And would, most likely. He leaned toward making her
Clear out, but she had asked for a little time.
That suited him. He told her he'd wait a month.
That night he made his bed up in the attic.
Above her Sarah heard John-Allen's steps,
As if by pacing he thought he could get away.
A month would pass so quickly, then where would she go?

In half that time the weather turned to snow
And rain that made the people speak of Noah.
The valley lay unconscious under a cloud
Of cold that penetrated everything.

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The creaking out of beds, the straightening up,
The numbness of cold and sleep-entangled minds
Made every morning thick and difficult.
Even so, the valley farmers worked
Their fields in heavy gear. Who prayed for rain
In August to trigger the newly planted crops
Now prayed as fervently for an end to rain,
For any rip in the horizon's shawl
Of unrelenting gray.
John-Allen heard
Some mention of the boy, a question or two
At grange or auction block that tweaked his heart,
But the talk gave way to the waitress's engagement,
The cashier's shame (exposed for tapping the till),
The Lower MacKenzie's polluted salmon run,
And long debates about the spotted owl
Or the state's alternatives to field burning.
The boy, some figured, was done in by a drifter,
While others thought he'd simply moved along.
His mother drank more beer, and that was that.

But not for them. Their lives were like a recording
Playing over and over. Their grief was their own.
Sarah forced herself to look ahead,
So each day, with eagerness and manic cheer,
She cooked fine meals and kept a spotless house,
Helped out in the fields if there was need of it
Yet always avoided the barn.
He noticed that
But didn't speak of it. That's natural,
He thought, himself finding fewer occasions
To go in there. He kept his distance in all ways,
Working the fields more than he had before
Or parking his tractor out there to watch the sky,
Though nothing he read there made living easier.
Or more to the point, showed him *how* to do it.
Then one day after supper she told him simply
The time had come. In the morning he could drive her
To the train in Albany. From his bed in the attic
He listened to the opening and closing of drawers.

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The day had come. He kept her waiting with work
Outside until the weather drove him in.
Now he lay beside the suitcase on the bed
And touched its spine. His eyes burned in the dark.

So this is what your pride has made of you,
He told himself, *companion to misery.*
What difference does it make? She cheated you
But otherwise stuck by you. She's tried her best
To make amends, and you've been touched by that
In spite of yourself, and now this further bond
Between the two of you that can't be broke.
What's natural or evil between two people?
You want and need each other. Let it go.

The door half-opened. Sarah hesitated,
Then spoke uncertainly.
"John-Allen, it's time."

He couldn't speak. She waited there a moment,
Perhaps for the suitcase to levitate and float
Into her hand as in a Disney movie.
The silly image faded. She reached for the bag,
And as she closed her fingers on its handle
His own hand, haltingly at first, found hers.
She held her breath, her husband did the same,
And then both hands gripped harder, holding on.
Now nothing was held back, not even words.
Then Sarah lay beside him in his arms.
Outside the sky was calm above the farm,
Though to the north the rain had turned to hail.
Over the coastal range a new storm blew.
The fall was ending. Winter had begun.

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HAROLD FROMM

Scholarship, Politics, and the MLA

In its Fall 1991 newsletter, the Modern Language Association of America provided a demonstration case of the way in which—by focussing its attention upon various deflective red herrings—it has been able to avoid addressing one of the most central issues of political correctness. In response to outsider attacks, the organization's Executive Council claimed that media criticisms of the MLA "reduce complex issues to slogans and name-calling" and that it is unreasonable for critics to see a majority of MLA's 30,000 members as imposing a monolithic leftist ideology on the humanities departments of American colleges and universities. And indeed, it *is* unreasonable to regard the majority of MLA's members as radicals. The unacknowledged reality, however, is that the most authentically damaging criticisms of political correctness have come not from the media but from this large centrist constituency itself, whose point of view can be played down by the Association until it becomes publicly necessary to insist to the outside world that MLA is *not* a monolithic community of leftists. A sample of this centrist constituency was made uncomfortably visible in the same issue of the *MLA Newsletter* in the form of two rather bitter letters complaining about the harassment of antifeminists by the ruling forces of the profession. Their authors could hardly have been dismissed as neoconservatives and the letters themselves voiced familiar professorial grievances about academic social engineering.

The argument that *numerically speaking* most MLA members are not in fact politically correct "radicals" cuts two ways: if it is true, then MLA does them a disservice when it pretends they don't exist except when it's convenient to trot them out to pacify media critics. But to speak numerically doesn't really make much sense in any case, since the character and operations of the academic literary profession are determined by a relatively

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small handful of influential scholars at major universities who eventually decide what goes into Norton and Heath anthologies (and now the MLA *Introduction to Scholarship*[1]), and thus what materials and attitudes students absorb, what projects they work on, and what books dominate the output of university presses (as any inspection of the book exhibit at the annual MLA convention makes obvious); in a word, they determine the governing character of life and work in the humanities.

Given such a context, the question bound to suggest itself to any well-informed reader confronted by the prospect of an *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literature* from the Modern Language Association is "Can this book be trusted?" The *Introduction* consists of a preface, fifteen essays, and an epilogue by eminent specialists surveying what the Association regards as some of the major areas of literary study in the academy today. If the point, however, of reading a book of this kind is to learn about the latest concerns of literature departments at the major universities, the ones that eventually determine the course of studies almost everywhere else, then it is hard to quarrel with all but one of the final choices (and that exception is begging for more than a quarrel). So while the book is indisputably politically correct, it has been carefully and considerately crafted: most of the contributors have read (and refer to) each other's drafts and the essay-chapters have been editorially interrogated and screened at many levels (with, again, what appears to be one egregious exception). The undeniable thrust of the collection is its reflection of the current expansion of "literary" studies into "cultural" studies, an expansion that has come about as a result of the devaluation of "literature" as a privileged category ("I have lost my faith [and, yes, I once had it] in literature as an institution," says Robert Scholes in his chapter on "Canonicity and Textuality") and its replacement by the more inclusive category of "texts," which includes films, popular culture, visual arts, criticism, philosophy, anthropology, and so on. The chapters on "Cultural Studies," by David Bathrick, and "Interdisciplinary Studies," by

[1] INTRODUCTION TO SCHOLARSHIP IN MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES, Second Edition, ed. by *Joseph Gibaldi*. The Modern Language Association of America. $37.00; $15.00.

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Giles Gunn, in effect describe what is taking place: a transformation that entails "a remapping of the humanities as a whole around new contents, new canons, new media, and new theoretical and methodological paradigms."

This remapping involves the disavowal of a number of sacrosanct traditional beliefs, such as:

> that there is one "definitive" meaning of any text that is to be associated with the intentions of some transcendent Author; that there is any such thing as an Author, transcendent or otherwise, who is alone, or even chiefly, responsible for what a text means; that texts must be read independent of their relations, anxious or imperialistic, to other texts; that reading can be viewed only as a process of reception and absorption but not of production and intervention; and that when reading, interpretation, criticism are seen as creative and not merely reflective activities, their operations must still be restricted to individual works and cannot be expanded to apply "literary" modes of analysis to the entire spectrum of cultural phenomena.

The contraries to these beliefs yield pervasive foundations for most of the book's accounts of present-day theory and practice, with the ubiquitous categories of race, gender, and class not far behind. Even though most of the authors are fairly self-conscious about their shared shibboleths, there are, inevitably, some breaches of taste or intrusions of righteousness, as when Andrea Lunsford (in a well-written and genial essay on rhetoric and composition) tampers with Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* by quoting his phrase about the "good [wo]man skilled in speaking," as though even the ancients needed to be saved from their false sexist consciousness, or when she informs us that the "Athenian citizenry" was "an elite all-male group," as if certain academic departments are not elite all-female groups—or academics themselves not as elite as you please; but hers is an avowedly gender-oriented political piece, sufficiently cordial to be tolerable despite its warm appreciation of its own virtues.

Donald Marshall's elegantly lucid and coherent account of "Literary Interpretation" (one of the book's best essays), notably influenced by the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, of which he is a translator, stresses the inability of texts to speak for themselves. Interpreters are mediators between authors and audiences, but "interpreting

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remains a complex social practice situated within a historical moment." Like most of the other scholars here, Marshall finds the term "text" preferable to "work," which suggests "a determinate and permanent form crafted to express its maker's original idea"; whereas "text," as something interwoven with history, society, language, and multiple reader-responses, encompasses the notion already expressed by D.C. Greetham in an earlier chapter on textual scholarship that pieces of writing are never seen outside of a particular physical embodiment whose binding, typography, annotations, critical reputation, setting in a library or bookstore, etc., all shape our responses. In their role as interpreters, teachers and critics bring to bear upon these texts their own professional and social histories, giving us not the "work" itself, but a very mediated product indeed. Yet somehow, critical responses cannot be completely arbitrary or socially conditioned but must maintain a connection with the author's intentions (it is not quite safe to use these words outside of quotation marks right now, but I'm in an intrepid mood). And audiences, inevitably, reweave the text into the fabric of their own lives, reconstructing it (or "producing" it) from the historically finite conditions of their own psychological experience. Speaking of a tension between a " 'hermeneutics of recovery,' which aims to bring the reader to sympathy with the text and what it says, and a 'hermeneutics of suspicion,' which lays bare the presuppositions and processes of signification of a text and renders them questionable," Marshall sees critical reading as both a defense against unself-conscious readers (who get what they "want" from a text) and against a misleadingly "self-evident" text whose meanings are far from unitary. He concludes that "to understand a text is to find in our own form of life points of contact with the form of life of which the text is a witness," a very Gadamerian compromise, but, I think, open to the danger of an infinite regress of finessing.

Robert Scholes's critique of literary canons expresses the now familiar (and plausible) position that the professionalization of literary studies at the end of the nineteenth century established a canon by means of political choices and processes that developed unnoticed because they were made to seem "natural," as though literary excellence were a self-identifying phe-

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nomenon rather than a judgment of "interested" people. Or as he puts it, "Now, we know that one set of appointments to the Supreme Court will give us one set of laws and another set of appointments will give us others." On the other hand, even he claims still to believe in "standards," while admitting that he "cannot find any single standard for determining the worth of a text." He too likes the idea of "textuality" rather than "literary work" because textuality "weakens the boundaries of the individual textual object and reduces the strength of its connection to an individual author or a specific situation, in order to emphasize the intertextuality of every such object and the freedom of the reader to establish connections. . . ." This too is a useful and plausible idea, provided that it also be applied to the funny coincidence that so many poems and novels are now understood to be about sexism, patriarchy, and racism. For the political, canon-making uniformity of postmodern academic perceptions is as much in need of canon-busting iconoclasm as the derogated critical imperatives of Matthew Arnold, an iconoclasm that should be applied to Chinua Achebe and Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick as passionately as it is to Joseph Conrad and Lionel Trilling. And how brilliant it would be to make this application now, rather than waiting twenty years until everybody and his/her graduate students have been socially constructed to put in their thumbs, pull out their plums, and say "Oh, what a good subject am I!"

A generalized professional self-criticism of this sort about what is "obviously true" or "natural" would give added potency to the observation made by Jonathan Culler, in his chapter on "Literary Theory," that "the main thrust of recent theory, diverse though it is, has been the critique of whatever is taken as natural, the demonstration that what has been thought or declared natural is in fact a historical, cultural construction." All of the major critical schools, from deconstruction to Marxism to feminism, he points out, share this debunking quality as they attempt to demonstrate that the God-given eternal verities have really been produced by men (and sometimes, women). But he cautions that once the notion of self-existing truths independent of mere human opinion has been demolished, "the recognition, which theory has encouraged, that all discourses, including those of theory, emanate from particular

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subject positions (situated in a network of sexual, racial, national, class, and disciplinary structures) does not by any means solve the problem of false universality or unjustified presumption of universality."

The failure to notice that oneself speaks from a "particular subject position" is also a worry to Naomi Schor, in her chapter on "Feminist and Gender Studies." She confronts the problem head-on: "By identifying my own position—I speak as an American teacher of French whose postgraduate professional career developed along with feminist criticism and for whom gender studies is an intriguing yet problematic notion—I am already performing a feminist critical act, namely refusing to speak from a position of supposed neutrality and pseudoscientific objectivity." But despite earnest efforts, she concedes, "assumed mastery and false universality constantly reassert themselves." Reviewing feminist activities from Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir to Terry Eagleton and Jane Gallop, Schor traces the breakup of a relatively monolithic white, bourgeois, liberal, East Coast feminism that was "dangerously totalizing and exclusionary in its claim to speak for all women" and its recent fragmentation as African-American, Chicana, Native American, Asian-American feminisms. As a result of this fragmentation, "Questions of identity that had been dismissed as pretheoretical were reopened from the standpoint of subjects [i.e., people] unaccounted for by dominant theories. The utopian ideal of sisterhood was displaced by the realistic recognition of struggle." Thus, "the very ground of feminism—notions such as a universal category of woman or the oppression of women by a universal patriarchy—began to heave and crack, and the temblor's aftershocks continue to be felt today." Yet Schor is alert to the equal but opposite problem of *too many sacrosanct subject positions* when she observes a bit nervously in her concluding paragraph: "There is struggle at the seminar table between increasingly fragmented constituencies, and *yesterday's marginal subjectivities are always in danger of becoming tomorrow's gatekeepers* [emphasis added]."

Fragmentation and marginality are two of the key concepts that haunt "identity politics," one of the most problematical issues both for theory and practice in the 1990s. Though not developed at length by any of the *Introduction*'s authors, this

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subject smolders throughout in the form of repeated attacks against "essentialism," the universal practice of mistaking local customs and beliefs for facts of nature. The "dangerously totalizing" definitions of "women" of which Naomi Schor speaks are attempts to establish women's essence by means of whatever particular description the describer happens to favor. Women are bitches or madonnas or the fair sex or the longer-lived sex or sirens, etc., depending on the era and cultural milieu in which they are described, as well as the interests of the describer. And this essentialism operates equally as well with respect to almost everything else: race, literary "works," virtue and vice, ethnicity, etc., so that our perceptions of things are not, to use Richard Rorty's term, "mirrors of nature," but thoroughly value-laden interests.

This anti-essentialism is all very well until the need arises to engage in activist politics. Then such admirably philosophic sensitivity is apt to be supplanted by what is called "strategic essentialism," that is, the convenient forgetting of the lessons of anti-essentialism in order to defend certain groups and interests for their "distinctive" but neglected or maligned characteristics, for—in a word—their *ascribed* essences, essences that reflect little more than garden variety bigotry when insisted upon in cases involving the interests of people you happen not to care about. Perhaps the movers behind a book as self-conscious as this *Introduction* felt that in order to exhibit MLA's obsessive sense of egalitarianism (though some positions turn out to be more equal than others), it was incumbent upon them to include an utterly flaky specimen of essentialism at its politically correct worst, the very sort of thing one might have feared about this book as a whole.

The chapter in question is called "'Border' Studies: The Intersection of Gender and Color," by Paula Gunn Allen, who (as identity politics requires) identifies herself—again and again and again—as a Native American woman (but whom I would identify as MLA's designated Serb, brandishing her weapons for ethnic cleansing). The opening sentence is perfect: "Not only has little changed since I entered the profession in the 1970s, nothing much has changed since Irenaeus, nearly two thousand years ago. They're still pontificating, excluding, and power-tripping, while we're still resisting, dissenting, decon-

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structing, and subverting." Unlike many of the other contributors, who remark on the radical opening up of the academy since the sixties, Allen finds that little has changed since then, and "nothing much" for the past two thousand years, even though "we" are still resisting and dissenting, "we" consisting of the elect in general, Native American women in particular, and Allen herself in very particular. "Though I had marched, pamphletted, and taught for peace and social justice, for civil, women's, and lesbian and gay rights" and many other things, the world simply refuses to get religion, and the academy remains reactionary. What shocks Allen above all is not so much that "nothing" has changed during the two thousand years before she was sent to save us but that her appearance has not immediately put an end to vice altogether (meaning all other "subject positions" besides her own). Though political correctness generally requires the worship of "Others," for Allen the otherness of "They" has been completely preempted by the narcissism of "We." "We still match personal experience and gnosis with canonicity, and those who tenaciously cling to the rotting pillars of Rome [e.g., those goddam Eurocentrics] dismiss us—or order us purged."

"By 1972 I understood several things: If an issue concerned Native people or women, men, and queers of color, neither the academy nor the intelligentsia at large would have a word to say." During her twenty years at the barricades, Allen "came to understand that the position of power for a true Warrior is the Void. It is from the Void that all arises and into the Void that all returns." It is the outcasts who produce "the most profoundly *literary* literature. . . . It is we who are creating the shape of the new world from the strokes of our pens, typewriter keys, and computer keyboards."

Allen's gnosis knows a lot, especially about the Void "where reside the keepers of wisdom. Women of color are willing and well-equipped to approach the still, dark center of the heart of the gynocosmos where nothing at all exists and whence, paradoxically, all must emerge. Other writers [those pesky Others again], strangers to the source of meaning, have talked about that mysterious foreboding place, the dark heart of creation, but it is we [Native American women writers]—perhaps because we are nothing ourselves [i.e., undervalued]—who stalk

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the void and dance the dervish of significance that is born through our parted lips and legs." And if this kind of messianic New Age strategic-essentialist moon-goddess identity-politics mishmash strikes you as insufficiently sweeping and categorical, then you need to know that "Native Americans are entirely concerned with relations to and among the physical and non-physical and various planetary energy-intelligences of numerous sorts," and if you happen to be a Native American, you damned well better believe it—if you can figure out what it means.

Apart from the merits of Allen's case for Native Americans, which admittedly has a few lucid intervals (even moon-goddess types sometimes deviate into sense), one wonders how it was possible, even for a multicultural MLA, to approve anything as remote from "scholarship" as these "strategic-essentialist" ravings.

It is unfortunate that Henry Louis Gates's chapter on "'Ethnic and Minority' Studies" was not positioned *after* Allen's rather than before. As one of the best essays in the volume, it would have pronounced a brutal judgment upon Allen's crude ethnic essentialism. Gates, himself previously an ethnic particularist engaged in unconvincing identity politics, has metamorphosed over the last few years into one of the most judicious, benign, and public-spirited of present-day intellectuals, a model of that declining breed, Russell Jacoby's "public intellectual."

Surveying the evolution of minority, but particularly black, studies in the academy, Gates observes, "Given the essentialist definitions of tradition at play in the construction of ethnically based canons and traditions, perhaps the search for manifestations of a collective ethnic unconscious or transcendent signifiers and signifying practices was inevitable," but he nevertheless sees such entities as fictions invented for political purposes. "The process of constructing a group identity, at the margins as at the very center, involves active exclusion and repudiation. . . . Ironically, then, the cultural mechanism of minority self-construction must replicate the cultural mechanism responsible for rendering it marginal in the first place." In other words, identity politics entails the same myopia and bigotry as any other politics. Or as Gates sharply puts it, "Where

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the center constructs the margin as a privileged locale, you assume authority by representing yourself as marginal, and, conversely, you discredit others by representing them as central." Did Paula Gunn Allen really read Gates's essay in draft?

Gates concludes that "the ritualized invocation of otherness" is now played out and that the margin "may have exhausted its strategic value." What is now needed is "to forgo the pleasures of ethnicist affirmation and routinized resentment in favor of rethinking the larger structures that constrain and enable our agency."

The volume's epilogue by Gerald Graff, "The Scholar in Society," is a defensive apologia for the politically correct status quo, whose central thesis is that the humanities today are *less* specialized than they used to be and that attacks against their specialization are really right-wing expressions of fear about their political relevance. But while it is certainly true that the humanities today are more wide-ranging and interdisciplinary than ever before, Graff is deceiving himself if he really believes that *the discourse of the humanities* is anything other than an increasingly obscure specialized language, although he concedes that "this is the way such research still tends to *look* to nonacademics." And to blame the bad press given the humanities, as Graff insists, on poor self-advertisement on the part of academic humanists vis-à-vis the lay public is an act of desperation. "After all," he writes, "if the new theories and methods were merely specialized and obscure, it is doubtful that people would be getting so worked up over them." Somehow, then, either humanist studies merely *look* obscure but are in fact threateningly intelligible, or else the media make them appear threatening by distorting them into simple-minded slogans that misrepresent them while nonetheless conveying their essential validity!

To this useful book I would raise three substantial objections. First, that the *Introduction* provides only minimal hints of the fact that there are a number of strong alternate points of view operating in contemporary scholarship in language and literature. If the editorial board was determined to include something from the wilder fringes, the dissenting radicalism of Camille Paglia would have been much more instructive than the fatuous thrashings of Paula Gunn Allen, and at least Paglia has

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a sharp sense of the ridiculous. The obstacle, of course, is that Paglia is not a member of the team, however "multicultural" its purview.

Second, identity politics and strategic essentialism, which some of the contributors *do* reject, require a more explicit and conscious philosophic inquiry than anything offered herein (except perhaps by Gates). Why, after all, stop at disabled, lesbian, third world women of color? Infinite modifications and interests can always be superadded until, finally, we arrive at the unique individual who represents an interest of One. Although I don't necessarily agree with everything that is said by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (or with Paglia either—or anybody, for that matter), Fox-Genovese's communitarian values are a necessary corrective to the infinite regress of identity politics, whose ultimate conflict would be a war of all against all in defense of each individual's personalized kinks. When every possible color is rejected for traffic signals because every one of them will offend somebody's nonexistent essence, nobody will be able to drive.

Lastly, the emphasis on textuality rather than literary works leaves no room at all for "art," a concept that doesn't even come up in the course of this entire volume, purportedly about "literature," however broadly construed. Can the contributors really believe that "art" has been superseded by righteousness, that aesthetic values are no longer of interest to anyone but reactionaries, that poems, novels, music, sculpture and architecture are nothing more than social constructions, that aesthetic response is just a euphemism for ideology? Their failure to deal with art and aesthetics is simply a misrepresentation of the social and psychological realities with which they are otherwise so obsessed, a mistaking of academia for the larger world in which pleasure is more real and less deluded than transient theories applauded by a few thousand colleagues.[2]

[2] It's worth calling attention to a recent essay by Gerald Graff in the September/October 1992 issue of *Lingua Franca*: "Disliking Literature at an Early Age." It announces the unsurprising news that Graff's aesthetic response to literature (and, I think, not literature only) has always been very weak. What turned him toward literature, finally, was his discovery that one could talk about books as ideas and politics. His current hobby horse (which has been ridden to the ground) is that literature departments should be less concerned with "literature" than with "teaching the conflicts" that are currently preoccupying politicized academics like himself. This is a program to which the MLA has given its benediction, as the present book makes pretty clear.

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People (including authors) have been replaced by "subjects" and aesthetic creativity has been replaced by "subject positions" and "social constructions." It's all too glib, too easy, too simple. These readily naturalizable concepts keep the journals like *Cultural Critique* and *Social Text* in business (journals that often read like academic counterparts of Jehovah's Witnesses' *Watchtower*), but like all other dogma that purport to explain everything, they explain too much to be believable. As for art and the creative self, even social-constructionist critics continue to sign their names to journal articles and books, just like essentialist "authors" and "artists" who naively believe it is they themselves who produce their "works." Greedy for prestige, social recognition for "their" creativity, and tenure for "their" achievements, these critics and scholars love their "socially constructed" selves as much as the rest of us love our obsolete "self-created" selves. But despite their disinterested pretensions, they are far from ready to take on the selfless, impoverished anonymity of stonecutters for medieval cathedrals.

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A. R. AMMONS

The Sale Sale

The day, a spring day already
dark and windy, has just blown
fourteen years away, a tag sale

down the street at Mr. Sale's
blue house, vultures lined up two
abreast all the way out to

and down the sidewalk waiting
for 3 P.M. and the fluttering greed
of the first rifling: Mr. Sale,

a courteous, Southern person
originally from Kentucky, could
pitch sentences whose rise,

stoop and wheel hawks could
school clarity from: he had a way
of being tough, reality's honer,

and merry: in just fourteen years
he went from department
chairman, hosting dinners and

setting policy, to what a tag
sale blows up: fourteen years
ago, when I lived elsewhere

otherwise, I heard his
voice on the phone offer me
a job I needed: now, even if

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I'm flattened, I admit to needing
nothing: Mr. Sale is
off somewhere, no wonder

where, but still I'll bet winking
precision's wit: I raise a
tear, sir, this windy day, to us.

Blues in the Valley

Route 96B has lain there
bending up and away over the opposite
ridge on its way out,
going out day and night,

while I've been here valley-bound
27 years and got so
I think I can hear
singing in the rocks, riffs,

the cool dream-reels
of boulders:
light bands near sundown
break out

underpinning the clouds on west hill,
and I know how
they've looked before, may look again,
how they'll thin down and fine away.

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Turning Things out Good

When death shuts
the outside world down

and one spirals
in one's own

considerations, what
face will come up

or what fear break out, or
will the corethread's

spinning emptiness
just draw

one in or split open
into a sliding sheet,

bulbing and winding
beingless air,

or what will one think:
will a thought ensphere

calming loving-goodness
and make of itself an

upward way, tunneling
attractively, lighted

with hope or some kind
of flashing doodad that

promotes sleep, a sleep
real dreams may hold up in.

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For My Beloved Son

The blackberries that ripened
soon after you left are

ripening again and thunderstorms
after the broken-down winter

are rolling through here again:
I keep looking for the season

that will bring you home:
I don't know how many times

I've put in the seed, watered
the plants, counted the blossoms.

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Five-Thirty A.M.

Out the eastern window at
five-thirty this morning
is the pear tree, the sycamore,
and the high hill, the crest of it
with a new moon just risen
above it, a crescent tipped beyond
the dark trees, so clear and golden,
a jewel, yes, one might say a jewel,
and already behind it the first
dawnlight spreading faint and
soft and gray, like a mass of minute
dead angel's wings coming closer,
closer. The crescent is less bright.
Soon it will be invisible. Oh, there is
only an instant of vouchsafing!
What can one do but write this
little poem, finish the wine, take
the sleeping pills, and go to bed?

Flying into St. Louis

It is socked in. Can't see a thing. Nor have I ever
seen it before except once, driving east,
when I passed through at night
over the great river
and saw lights and the tremulous arch like a phantasm
through my off window. I was fighting
sleep, alone and desperate, as Americans so often are.
Yet my grandfather lived here.
I never saw him either

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and my mother saw him only once after
she was two years old, which was when
he and my grandmother divorced
in 1898 in New York—
a rarity then.
Years later my mother said, "He was a
seedy businessman in St. Louis." That's all.
A manufacturer of candied cherries or souvenir ashtrays?
I don't even know his name.
But seedy enough he was to beget my mother,
and thus one quarter of my blood flowed from his veins,
one quarter of my genes came from his testicles.
Is that where the madness came from then, the pain,
the desperation? For sixty-five years
I've blamed my mother and father.
I've climbed their trees and lopped off
their branches. I've held
their words in my mind like cudgels.
O God, if only you existed! No one but you
can help me now. It all may have been done
by the stranger from St. Louis
whose name I do not know.
I walked through the thronged corridor of the fog-bound
terminal
alone and desperate,
and boarded the plane to San Francisco.

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Wife Poem

And it's clear at last, she dropped
down from the moon, not like some
sylphy Cynthia at Delphi, after all she's
not seventeen, but with the sexual
grace and personal implacability
of a goddess of our time; so he says to
himself at night seeing the glow
of her sleep in her half (two-thirds really)
of their bed, the claire de lune of her shoulder
and forehead behind the deep clouds
of her hair. He drinks his wine
and swallows more pills. The birds
make their first aubade, little chirps and
chitterings, and outside the first light
mists their window. The day will be awful,
nervy and dull and sullen. His last
cigarette, his final gulp of chardonnay
in pain and weakness, and he presses against
her warm glow, thinking sweetly of how
he swam as a boy of twelve, almost sixty
years ago, in the warm pond beyond
the elms and hickories at the meadow's
edge. He turned like a sleepy carp among
the water lilies, under the dragonflies
and hot clouds of the old days of summer.

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Alteration

You thought growing older
  would be more of the same,
going a little slower,
  walking a little lame.

But you knew, or you were a fool,
  that alteration is what we keep;
tonight will not be the equal
  of last night, even in sleep.

The Woodcut on the Cover of Robert Frost's *Complete Poems*

A man plowing starts at the side of the field
nearer his house and works outward and away.
Why? Because plowing is always an adventure,
and then the slow walk home at end of day.

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EMILY GROSHOLZ

Where the Sky Used to Be

I

Out in woods at night,
looking up, you're so surprised
by two thousand visible stars
on blackness, you rub your eyes.
"Mama, we're in outer space."

Indeed we are,
stuck here and rolling where?
Saved from day-time vertigo
just barely by the false,
sunny, dusty torsion of the air.

II

"Hold me up higher," you say, then say louder.
I ratchet you up, and sigh. You smile
at your wish-granting mama,
flutter your lashes. Promise me anything!
"I want to touch the sky."

And if I held you high above my shoulders,
then could you touch? You get
the point, and wriggle down my arms, smiling
and piqued. "I know I couldn't." So?
The sky is our recurrent blue invention.

Seeing's social contract, all the shelter
we long for: ceiling, roof, beanstalk umbrella.
An artifact of wish. Country of air
to the unquestioning serious,
and to the joking questioner, not there.

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Anna

Huron's cold wind shudders in the trees
by Anna's grave, grandmother I never knew.
It rakes the narrows gliding back towards Erie
where my grandfather piloted
his cabin cruiser through the bounding 'twenties.
Doted upon by the symphonic Joneses
whose brilliant daughter he abruptly married,
fathering three children far away
from Philadelphia's teapots and his mother,
he charted a new world
according to the stars of home and office
and the church his wife's grandfather built.

Cold wind. A world devoured
by wolf-tooth epidemics all at once:
his borrowed parents and his wife
who took a fourth child with her, underground.
Nothing left but three small children
he could only hurry to his mother,
and leave them all behind, abruptly.
Cold in cold wind off the Detroit River,
I wonder how he understood his life
when he ran off to Paris,
how often then he dreamed the revenant
daughter of musical parents.

Anna Jones, red-haired, hot-tempered, fond
of playing with her children in the nursery,
singing songs my mother soon forgot.
Fond of taking the Athletic Club
by storm, invading the men's pool
with her three pretty ducklings,
two splashing in her wake, one in her arms.
Fond of quoting Liszt on the piano.
Fond of my grandfather.
See, she hovers at his hotel window,
encouraging a cold wind in the trees
along the rue Domat, touching his cheek.

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BRUCE BEASLEY

Going Home to Georgia

Beyond the pawn shops and tattoo parlors and Tofu House
of Atlanta, the highway drones
out to the squat, clipped peach trees
in pink and green flower
and the roadside doublewide
V.I.P. Massage Parlor
("Truckers Welcome")
and the purple

quilts of Leonardo's *Last Supper*
flapping in the March wind, by the gargoyles
and lawn gnomes
and tin-roofed shacks,
and crosses scrawled with warnings of hellfire,
and buzzards

wheeling low. I remember, suddenly, Orvieto—
how, in Signorelli's fresco
of the torments of the damned
the noose
by which a devil strangles a young woman
has disappeared, worn down
by centuries on the church wall. And he yanks,

still, at the nothing between them,
his green foot pressed to her temple,

while the green- and pink-winged angels

stand arrogant over the scene, beating back
the rising damned,
barely glancing at the horrors below.

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There's enough we can see
to choke us
in the crumbling chimneys and steeples
in the half-rain, half-sun
of this late afternoon,
the Buford Highway Body Shop's
billboard: "Jesus Christ
is the way, truth, and light. Free

estimates . . ."

—I've come back to Macon for the first time
in years, the Ocmulgee River's
old smell of thick mud and stagnating
water and honeysuckle
blent
through what's left of Baconsfield Park.
Willed
by a Confederate general "for the enjoyment
of white women and children,"
it's sold now

by Supreme Court order and sporting
McDonald's and condos surrounding
the swampy
magnolia-shadowed pond

where I, a white child, gathered
salamanders
with my father
from the crevices of mossy rocks
twenty-six years ago.

By the river the graves of my parents
lie abandoned, side by side,
with five years separating their last
miserable days,
the obscure torments of the drunk
that drove them both to want to die, to lie

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down here before their time
and let
the world and its cravings fall away.
I've come back with what I've been able
to shore against their dread,
what things might suffice to heal
this world
without losing it: rainy
sunlight over Rose Hill, miles
of pool halls and wrecked Plymouths, mounds
of hubcaps and inner tubes, wild
iris and cabbage palm and stakes of crosses—for the first
time since they died I can breathe
the sweet, soiled air
of this swampy burying ground
again and answer them both

it's enough, and enough, the stuff of this world.

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Marthology

MAYBE THE LAST THING MARTHA GRAHAM WOULD HAVE WANTED was to be remembered in words. But maybe not. All her life she opposed the few strategies dance has for preserving its artifacts: notation, archiving, documentary filming. Most serious of all, she resisted establishing definitive versions of her dances so that they could be produced repeatedly. She never would engage in what is by now the standard practice, even for modern dancers, of allowing her works to be performed by other companies. I know of only a couple of those instances, one dance revived for students at the Juilliard School and possibly two works mounted by Batsheva, the Israeli modern dance company founded by Graham's patron Bethsabee de Rothschild. In her own company Graham of course maintained a rotating repertory, but she reserved the right to change choreography and costumes, to rework ideas, reprocess themes, and convert dances into entirely new forms after they had been seen by the public. The elements of her style and technique—and even the dancers' body types—were constantly being reshaped, so even the choreographies that had stabilized never looked the same. And her aversion to passing on her own roles to younger dancers is well-known. More than a little part of her, I think, put dances on the stage for her own indulgence, and once she'd worn them, she had no taste for lending them to anyone else.

But she didn't mind having things said about her in print, the more worshipful the better. If she couldn't see herself on stage (no dancer can), she basked in the mirror of fame. I doubt if there was ever a time that Martha Graham didn't capture the eye of journalists, intellectuals and artists. By 1992, a year after her death at age ninety-seven, no less than nine books had been devoted exclusively to her life and work.[1] Not surprisingly, given the elusive nature of her repertory, no serious critical or analytical study of Graham's choreography has yet appeared. The books that do exist picture, with different lighting

[1] In chronological order they are: *Martha Graham*, ed. by Merle Armitage (1937); *Martha Graham—Sixteen Dances in Photographs*, by Barbara Morgan (1941); *Martha Graham—Portrait of the Lady as an Artist*, by Leroy Leatherman (1966); *The Notebooks of Martha Graham*, ed. by Nancy Wilson Ross (1973); *Martha Graham—A Biography*, by Don McDonagh (1973); *Deep Song—The Dance Story of Martha Graham*, by Ernestine Stodelle (1984); *Martha—The Life and Work of Martha Graham*, by Agnes de Mille (1991); *Blood Memory—An Autobiography* (1991); and *Martha Graham—The Evolution of Her Dance Theory and Training 1926–1991*, compiled by Marian Horosko (1992).

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effects, an evolving persona, an artist whose entire public life could be called a self-dramatization.

The solo photographs in Barbara Morgan's collection, and in the Merle Armitage anthology of 1937, show a body bent into extreme angles, a face wiped of external signs and looking inward, like a classical Asian mask. In motion she may be pitched off her balance or spiraling inward, but you see that the center is where the movement comes from. She's usually dressed in something stark and long that exposes no skin except the hands and feet, and that introspective face. Compared to the lyrical, exuberant concert dancers of the time, she must have been a jolt—even a reproach. What are the inner voices to which this figure is attending? She might be a trance medium, bringing forth the messages of souls that have passed on and that have chosen her as their interpreter—not that *she* has chosen *them*. She says in *Blood Memory*: "There are always ancestral footsteps behind me, pushing me, when I am creating a new dance, and gestures are flowing through me. . . . You get to the point where your body is something else and it takes on a world of cultures from the past . . ." And in the *Notebooks* she wonders if beginnings might not be "when the great over-whelming tide of unconscious memory decides to use us as an instrument for the advancement of life . . ."

It is impossible to reconstruct the chronological development of Graham's thought through her aphorisms, which overlap and weave together as they get refined and retold. The idea of "ancestral footsteps" probably came up in the 1940s when she began Jungian analysis with Frances Wickes. Jung's notion of the collective unconscious helped her to transpose what started as a personal, meditative search onto a more universal plane. Her dances of the mid-forties explore most deeply and originally the idea that tragic themes and characters of past time can re-enact themselves through present dances.

I notice something else in the Armitage and Morgan picture gallery: in the early group dances, the intensity seen in Graham's solos expands outward. Multiplied ten or twelve times it starts to look dionysiac, sometimes even dangerous. The costumes are still austere, the bodies squared-off and resolute. But the power that is secret, contained, in Graham's own person seems about to burst out into space as the rows of young women advance, shoulder to shoulder, their arms thrust out. They jump ecstatically or hurl themselves backwards, pulling their energy not from within themselves but from the earth or some other antagonistic force. Graham herself is never part of these groups. When included in the photograph, she's a separate, contrasting entity, whose small, fierce presence dominates and gives focus to the group. Despite some of her biographers' efforts to picture her as a dewy aspirant, she was thirty-two when she produced her first independent concert in New York, past thirty-five in the years of the astounding early group works, *Heretic* (1929),

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Primitive Mysteries (1931), *Celebration* (1934) and *Chronicle* (1936). I'm not sure she could have managed the wild and repetitive movement she gave to the group then. But in theatrical terms she didn't have to move a lot to become the vortex for their energy. And at no stage would she have seen herself as one of the girls.

Graham's written statements collected at this time were very direct, sensible and strong. "A dancer on the stage should be in command of all things physical." "This is a time of action, not re-action." "Since the dance form is governed by social conditions, so the American rhythm is sharp and angular, stripped of unessentials. It is something related only to itself, not laid on, but of a piece with that spirit which was willing to face a pioneer country." Later, after the Jungian sea change, she spoke more poetically. Like her dances, her words became more dramatic. Instead of dancing about the individual, the frontier spirit, she sought heroic archetypes in the Greek myths, in religion, and in history and literature. *Blood Memory* and the *Notebooks* are fascinating documents of this search. Both of them are performances, deliberately creating a character. Maybe that's the process of all biographical writing. The difference between these two books and those of Stodelle, Leatherman, McDonagh, and de Mille is that Graham herself seems to have choreographed them.

How *Blood Memory* came into being is open to question. The words sound like Graham, but it's hard to imagine her, frail and aged, finding the resources to create such a book while also maintaining a regular presence in the studio, doing new dances, going on tour with the company. The book consists largely of anecdotes and reminiscences, probably told to a tape recorder and put in order by the same nameless person Graham mentions sitting close by with a yellow pad and taking notes when she gave interviews. That person was her last associate, Ron Protas, whom Graham trusted so inalterably that she left him in charge of the dance company, repertory, licensing of teachers, and the lord only knows what else.

Blood Memory proceeds in fairly chronological order from Graham's youth in Pittsburgh and Santa Barbara through her first dancing days with Denishawn, her early struggles as an independent, and her major choreographies. Some of the well-known parts of this story are given new dimensions—her attraction to the theatricality and the cruelty of Catholic liturgy for instance. There are new vignettes, diversions, and cameos by a host of stars, from potentates to couturiers. The central character here is a wise goddess who's triumphed over her detractors and gained a secure place in history. The tempestuous, demanding dragon appreciatively described by Leroy Leatherman has mellowed. The destructive passions that flare in Don McDonagh's account have cooled. The militant reformer Agnes de Mille pictures marching with her up to the barricades of American philistinism has retired from the good fight, and the life in the studio, pictured in imaginative and loving detail by Stodelle, no longer seems

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to lure Graham except as the site of a dancer's never-ceasing desire for physical practice. Movement, not sex, was her last regret, it seems.

Except for a dalliance here and there, Graham admits to only one great love, dancer Erick Hawkins. This epic affair, marriage and breakup is the real centerpiece of Graham's book, inextricably tying together her personal and artistic experience. The first male to dance with her group, Hawkins literally embodied the sexual side of her life and her dance. He made it possible for her to push through the themes she'd dwelt on for the first decade. Not only sex but theater itself opened up. She began to make dances that were a little less abstract, a little more dramatic, dances with stories an audience could relate to. The neophyte Hawkins walked in on *American Document* during the creative process and immediately influenced the way it turned out. The finished work appealed to the audience of 1938 as no earlier Graham dance had. Theatrical, literary (it used spoken texts) and patriotic, it was just right for the times, and it pointed the way to a five-year Americana phase that culminated in *Appalachian Spring*.

The company, the repertory, and the aesthetic of Graham have always been in evolution, but 1938 was an obvious turning point. Hawkins' abrupt intrusion offended not only some of the audience she'd been cultivating, but some of her dancers. Several of them left, and Graham quickly acquired more males and made dances that used them. She was having the romance of her life, and her dances became softer. Critics mentioned humor for the first time. It's probably inevitable that dancers choreograph their own lives, their own attitudes; the act requires a total investment—body, mind, and psyche. Onstage Graham played a tremulous bride (*Appalachian Spring*), a comic housewife with a philandering husband (*Punch and the Judy*), a silly artiste (*Every Soul Is a Circus*), and then the doomed Jocasta (*Night Journey*) and a string of wronged and wrathful Greek matrons. Most of the time Hawkins was her opposite number.

Graham doesn't mention that Hawkins did a great deal more for the company than dance. His role is detailed by others. De Mille sees him as a monster. McDonagh treats him with respect, as a creative soul trying desperately to assert himself in Graham's shadow. In addition to dancing and helping rehearse the repertory, Hawkins worked behind the scenes. His attention to production values, publicity, booking and fundraising made Graham's the best-known modern dance company in America. In 1945, says McDonagh, Hawkins moved out for the first time, smarting under his eternally subordinate status in an enterprise he had worked hard to keep afloat. They uneasily reconciled, married in 1948, and split up two years after that. Stodelle simplifies the whole traumatic epoch, relegating Hawkins to his roles in Graham's dances. The final separation occurred, she says, because a callous Hawkins left Graham alone for some days in London, when she was injured on an ill-fated 1950 tour.

Obviously the relationship was agonizing to both Graham and

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Hawkins, and there's probably no single way it can be told fairly. For Graham, though, it seems to translate into the personal tragedy that precipitates great art. If, as I believe, Graham wanted us to see her dances as the argument and the distillation of her life, *Blood Memory* and the *Notebooks* can be taken as a sort of Rosetta stone, a composite text for decoding them. Erick Hawkins, like everybody else in her books, is a catalyst. He leaves her in a productive emotional knot that she spends the rest of her life unraveling. Where she looked was into her own psyche. She never talks about his, or speculates how they might have done things differently. Neither *Blood Memory* nor the *Notebooks* is indexed, so it's hard to trace Graham's account of any single character, but at one point she sums up the active period of their relationship in terse, flat words: "Erick danced with my company, and gradually we had a very deep love affair. After eight years of living together, Erick decided we should marry. I didn't want to but I did it. During that ninth year it all fell apart. It shows. Never try to hold on to anything."

Far more lasting was the aftermath. Around 1945 Graham met Frances Wickes and began what she and everyone but de Mille calls psychotherapy.[2] In contrast to the terse way she talks about Hawkins, Graham offers a detailed if partial account of her state of mind after they'd broken up, through eleven astonishing pages of letters she wrote to Wickes starting in 1951. This is the only admitted record of Graham's feelings at the time, or any time. Graham lore is full of burned letters, lost films, and mysteriously unavailable or unidentified scenarios, so the survival and publication of this particular file is significant. It shows Graham, for once, vulnerable; she says she finally understands "the increasingness of despair." At one point she imagines a dance about love in which "there would be no duets and no lover." The struggle, she says, "is no longer with him but with myself to accept the principle of lover rather than [the] concrete [reality]."

Graham's books don't identify the other forms in which love put her on trial. Louis Horst, her first protector, lived with or near her much longer than Hawkins did, and, it could be said, was a far greater influence on her art. I suppose she knew enough about psychology to recognize him as the father-figure everyone else took him for. She denies having had an affair with Isamu Noguchi, but they had to be soul mates for his stage designs to complement her dances so

[2] "Martha was never psychoanalyzed," says de Mille. "She merely talked conversationally" with Wickes. This is only one of the many errors in de Mille's book. De Mille's Graham is an idol, frozen in amber. Everything she did that de Mille takes account of is done once and never changes. Everything in the dance world is as it was and ever shall be since the moment de Mille first noticed it. Given de Mille's literary reputation and her ability to tell a rousing good story, her book will probably outlast the other Graham chronicles. Since it was evidently completed seven years before its release, there's no excuse for the editors at Random House failing to exercise control over its historical and interpretive waywardness.

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perfectly. After Hawkins came a long line of nonsexual male partners, all of whom must have received her devotion; dancers Stuart Hodes, Bertram Ross, Ross Cohan, Tim Wengerd; managers Leatherman, Craig Barton and Ron Protas. She depended on these men in ways she didn't depend on women. They all were, in a balletic sense, her creative partners. She couldn't have danced without them, but only she was to be the star.

What Graham constructed for herself over the ruins of the Hawkins idyll, re-imagined through dreams, myth, and an assiduously cultivated unconscious, was a series of central roles in a series of remarkable dances. The vengeful Jocasta wasn't the first but it was probably the most striking. All these women seek love in the wrong places. Or they struggle to find the ability to love, whereupon the dance can end. In her dances Graham focuses our sympathies on the woman's capacity for love, her search within herself for it, not on the man who manages to elicit love from her, or the characters who are accessories to that love. The centrality of this woman's need, in effect a need to which everyone else is subject, explains why Graham was able to stay on the stage long after she could dance, and why she nearly had to destroy herself before she could leave the stage.

She felt it was Ron Protas who rescued her from the abyss she slid into in the early 1970s. He helped her recover from alcoholism and self-hatred. He also gave her a new, nondancing persona. After she returned to the company, she grew suspicious of those who tried to keep it going in her absence. Bert Ross and Mary Hinkson, cherished dancers up to then, were sacrificed to her paranoid fancies. ". . . those I had placed in charge of my company did not want me back." After she exiled them, Protas called the shots. The company went into the glamour business. Graham wasn't onstage but she remained the star, exquisitely gowned and groomed, reciting her litanies of inspiration, consorting exclusively with the biggest stars. Or rather, she didn't consort with them, they paid court to her.

They gave her money, appeared at her fundraisers. They wanted to work for her and she made parts for them. Fonteyn, Nureyev, Baryshnikov, Liza Minnelli. Madonna would have been the next. This phase of Graham mythmaking kept "her" alive—the Graham that was by then a symbol, a business, an artistic achievement, as much as a human being. For some of us, she expired when she made the celebrated "What Becomes a Legend Most?" ad, in which she posed, swathed in mink, with Rudi and Margot, all of them looking pleased and haughty and undancerly. Probably the Graham company got a big donation from Blackglama but Martha kept the mink. The interesting thing is, she had engaged in a similar mink escapade long before. According to Don McDonagh, she modeled an I.J. Fox creation in 1938. He doesn't say whether it was Hawkins' idea, but everyone agrees Martha always had expensive taste.

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RICHARD HORNBY

Dramatizing AIDS

A SEVEN-HOUR PLAY ABOUT AIDS! What could be less promising? True, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* has been earning awards and rave reviews, but it is hard to trust plaudits, given the subject matter. Who would want to seem unsympathetic to AIDS victims? I therefore attended the marathon production at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles with about the same enthusiasm as I felt for an ongoing root canal operation, expecting something painful and boring but nonetheless unavoidable. For once, however, the other critics were right; *Angels in America* is a lavish, satirical, morally challenging, wildly imaginative, compelling drama.

The play is set in the mid-1980s, during the depths of the Reagan era. It is rare for an author to be able to capture the essence of a period so recent, but Kushner makes its hypocrisies seem bizarre and distant, as pious statements about family values and free enterprise justify graft, corruption, greed, callousness, and social decay. In most AIDS plays, the disease is exploited for cheap sympathy, but in *Angels* it embodies the realities of desire and death in an unfeeling, escapist society.

Despite its length, the play focuses on just five individuals, over a period of about eighteen months (plus a brief epilogue set in 1990): a gay male couple, a Mormon husband and wife, and, most amazingly, the real-life figure of Roy Cohn. This Republican big shot, former aide to Joseph McCarthy, crony of several Presidents, right-wing ideologue (he actually influenced the judge to sentence the Rosenbergs to death!), died of AIDS in August of 1986. He is portrayed here as a brutal, manic, lying manipulator, a Richard III without the hump. He denies being a homosexual, not out of any moral compunction, but because "homosexuals are men who know nobody and nobody knows. Who have zero clout," insisting that he is a heterosexual who has sex with men. Such is his power (especially as depicted in a bravura performance by Ron Leibman) that you actually swallow this meaningless distinction.

Cohn's protégé, Joe Pitt, is an ambitious young Mormon lawyer, whose wife Harper is addicted to tranquilizers. Their plot deals with their growing realization that straight-arrow Joe is actually gay. The fact that Mormons combine a conservative lifestyle with an outlandish theology is yet another contradiction that Kushner explores. The Mormon's belief in angels is the source for the play's title, and a basis for several funny, wild fantasy scenes, while the connection with

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Judaism (Mormons believe that the lost tribes of Israel emigrated to America) links the Pitts with Cohn, and with Louis Ironson, an anxiety-ridden Jewish intellectual who has left his lover, Prior Walter, because he is unable to cope with Prior's AIDS.

Kushner spares us no clinical details of the illness, but the focus on Louis' *reaction* to them rather than on the disease per se prevents the play from becoming maudlin. The trouble with AIDS as a subject for drama is the very compassion it evokes, which destroys conflict. What can be said in favor of AIDS? (I did actually read of a right-wing preacher who thanked God for the disease, which he saw as righteous punishment for homosexuals, though he did not make it clear why the Almighty seems to have it in for hemophiliacs too.) Depictions of endless pathos, where the only suspense is in how long the author can forestall the inevitable ending, are hardly dramatic. Thus successful plays involving disease—Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, Ibsen's *Ghosts*—focus not on the victims but on the repercussions on those around them. Louis' dilemma is one that ultimately engages us all: How far do the obligations of love take us? Is a committed relationship supposed to be a suicide pact?

Kushner deftly uses other techniques to destroy sentimentality. At one point, the two couples have intense emotional episodes that could easily become maudlin if they were not staged *simultaneously*, in a split scene showing both homes at once; each scene comments on the other, distancing it from us. Kushner also has a wicked sense of humor, which he employs at the most emotionally intense moments; when Prior shows Louis his dark red lesions of Kaposi's Sarcoma, for example, which are literally the mark of death, he jokes, "I am a lesionnaire. The Foreign Lesion. The American Lesion. Lesionnaire's disease. My troubles are lesion." The jokes defuse the obvious melodrama of the scene, but at the same time make it more truly moving, recalling Mercutio mocking his own death in *Romeo and Juliet.*

By the end of the play, nothing much has happened. Joe and his groggy wife have at last separated; Cohn is dead; Prior ironically hangs on, reunited with Louis. The focus has not been on plot, but on witty dialogue, perceptive satire of sexual and political attitudes, plus exuberant spectacle, the last inspired by the cool dreams of drugged Harper and the contrasting fevered ones of Prior. "God almighty," he cries, as one of the dreams begins, "*Very* Stephen Spielberg!"—both justifying and comically deflating an extraordinary, angelic light show.

Ron Leibman, as noted, was a magnificent Roy Cohn, matched by the very different, sensitive, understated, wry performance of Joe Mantello as Louis. Stephen Spinella was suitably flamboyant and bitchy as Prior, but I missed the character's aristocratic background, since he is supposed to come from an old rich WASP family. Jeffrey King was appropriately square-jawed and uptight as Joe, but I found Cynthia Mace monotonous as the drug-addicted Harper. Part of the problem is in the writing—Kushner makes the character entirely passive,

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and mystified far too long about her husband's sexual orientation—but contrasts can always be found in any role of length. The supporting cast, all playing multiple roles, were excellent, especially Kathleen Chalfant, who performed both male and female characters with total believability. John Conklin designed the hallucination scenes with great panache—wonderful theatrical illusion with all the wires showing, as the script requests—but his basic setting, showing a large gray Federalist façade with a crack down the middle, was awkward and obvious.

Angels in America drags a bit in the second half, which includes scenes in Moscow, and an inept episode set in heaven, where both the satire and the spectacle fall flat. Kushner has admitted that the second part needs extensive rewriting, so that the version that arrives in New York will probably be tighter. But Gordon Davidson, artistic director of the Mark Taper Forum, deserves praise for recognizing the extraordinary nature of the piece, and sinking $1.3 million into producing it. Last year, he co-produced Robert Schenkkan's *The Kentucky Cycle* (see *The Hudson Review*, Vol. XLV, No. 2, Summer 1992), another marathon work that became the first play in history to win the Pulitzer Prize without a New York production. This season, Davidson once again put Los Angeles theatre on the map.

Simon Gray is a witty, literate English writer who is popular with us American cognoscenti; his plays have usually succeeded in New York, though always off-Broadway, sometimes doing better than their London versions. *The Holy Terror* is a reworking of a play that flopped on the West End in London in the mid-eighties called *Melon*, about the mental breakdown of a ruthless publisher.

The new version has the title character telling his story in a lecture from the fake Tudor stage of a place called the Cheltenham Women's Institute, as part of a series entitled "Why Me?", featuring individuals who have suffered catastrophes in their personal lives. Such an earnest, sparsely attended lecture series is just what a posh women's group might concoct; it also creates a comical distancing effect for Melon's lurid tale, which in the earlier production, despite a superb performance by Alan Bates, seemed crudely clinical.

In the story Melon tells, which we see enacted, the manic publisher takes over a distinguished but failing publishing house. Books with titles like *Masturbation without Shame* and *The Madonna in Chains* quickly revive finances, but of course turn the place upside-down. Melon forces out the old guard of worthy staff members, bamboozles the authors, and has sex with every woman within reach, if necessary on his office floor. His breakdown begins when he starts to imagine that his faithful, long-suffering wife is herself having an affair, which, in Strindbergian fashion, obsesses him by its very unlikelihood. In the end, Melon practically forces her into the arms of a TV personality, and goes bonkers, writhing on the floor and then breaking off to describe his writhing to the good ladies of Cheltenham.

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The action of *The Holy Terror* is faster and funnier than was *Melon*, yet also more poignant. Nonetheless, like its predecessor, it flopped, despite a good performance by Daniel Gerroll in the lead, an adequate supporting cast, and deft directing by Simon Gray himself. Time to give up on the hapless Melon, Mr. Gray! Let him rest in peace, and move on to something else. You and I seem to be the only ones who liked this play, which was certainly more interesting than what most American playwrights are turning out these days.

Graham Reid's *Remembrance* is a bittersweet play set in the cheerless environs of Belfast, Northern Ireland. A Catholic widow and a Protestant widower, both in their sixties, meet in a local cemetery, where each has a son buried, killed in sectarian violence. Despite their losses, each shows a surprising lack of vindictiveness, viewing the troubles besetting their country as a background disaster far beyond their control. They can sadly recall the days when Belfast was the safest city in Europe.

The two gradually fall in love, which Reid depicts as a quiet, dignified, yet genuine emotion. Their children, however, view their liaison with disgust. It is bad enough that the couple are of opposing religions. Even worse, the widower is a retired member of the British army, despised by the Irish Catholics, while the widow's dead son was a fanatic member of the I.R.A., despised by the Irish Protestants. But worst of all, as far as the young folks are concerned, is that the couple are expressing romantic feelings at an unseemly age. Growing old is supposed to be a kind of castration.

The play is thus a reversal of the traditional boy-meets-girl plot in drama, where an older character or characters try to block a young couple's union. Here, the pair are old, while the rigid, unjust blocking characters are their own kids. The retired soldier's son, a policeman himself, hates Catholics maniacally. One of the widow's daughters, whose husband, another I.R.A. zealot, is serving a life sentence for murder, naturally has little use for Protestants; this does not stop her, however, from asking her mother to take her three children so that she can go off to England to start a new life! Reid's contempt for the rigid, selfish younger generation of Northern Irish is considerable, yet his depiction of their kindhearted, decent elders, whose human feelings are not blocked by ideology, holds out some hope for their apparently cursed country.

Terence Lamude directed the off-Broadway production of *Remembrance*, with scenery by Bill Stabile, whose setting perfectly captured the neat, proud quality of a military man's home, but did not provide enough contrast in the Irish Catholic counterpart. One of the many insightful points in the script is the difference between working-class and lower-middle-class lifestyles, which in the United States have few distinctions, but which in Northern Ireland mean the difference between outdoor and indoor plumbing. The production starred Milo O'Shea and Frances Sternhagen, an Irishman and an American

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woman, with a supporting cast that also mixed the two nationalities; you would never have known it from the actors' perfect accents and demeanor, however. O'Shea, an old pro born in Dublin, well-known in the United States for his many film and stage roles, was wonderfully subtle in his performance, managing to combine a military bearing with a warm gentleness. Sternhagen, last seen in New York in the title role of *Driving Miss Daisy*, matched O'Shea in sincerity and charm, as the most genuinely sexy woman I have seen on the New York stage in a long time.

Five years ago David Mamet and I were both short-listed for the position of director of drama at M.I.T., my alma mater. Why Mamet, who can pull down a million dollars per script in Hollywood, wanted to go into academia was a mystery to me. Given his latest play, *Oleanna*, which deals with a college professor and his politically-correct student, I am even more mystified. This lurid piece makes campus life seem like scholarly hell.

The play opens with a college professor in his office, talking endlessly with his wife on the telephone about a house they are trying to buy. A thin, dowdy female student waits while he stammers on in typical Mamet fashion, with endlessly repeated phrases in sentences that are never finished. When he finally hangs up, she explains that she is totally mystified by his lectures, his book, and the assignments. Instead of trying to help her, the professor continues talking in his same staccato, obscure fashion, railing against society, the college, and education generally, sounding like some fugitive from the 1960s. Grades are meaningless, and tests are garbage, measuring only "the ability to retain and spout back misinformation." If she feels stupid, why so did he, back when he was a student, which is why he is now trying to reform the system. His incoherent tirades only mystify the poor student further. He offers to ignore all her grades so far, and give her special help.

In the second act, the hapless student returns to the professor's office. It soon becomes apparent that in the interim she has been transformed into a monster of political rectitude. Her unnamed "group" has made her see the professor with new clarity: His saying previously that he liked her and wanted to give her extra tutorials were sexual overtures; his mildly sarcastic comments about the contrasting copulatory practices of rich and poor were sexual harassment; putting his arm around her shoulders in a fatherly manner was attempted rape. His lectures and book are elitist; even his anti-education harangues were an insult to poor students using college to get ahead.

The student's complaints to the professor's tenure committee that he is sexist and elitist have led them to rescind a previously favorable recommendation. She is now prepared to go to the police with charges of battery and rape, but will withdraw all her accusations if he accepts her list of approved books for class—and bans his own book!

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In a rage, he finally attacks her for real. The moment of assertiveness is too much for the bumbling fellow, however, and he quickly backs off. Now thoroughly trapped, he agrees to all her demands, and will publicly deliver a statement of apology and self-denigration.

Even if we accept that such an outrageous travesty of justice could actually occur (and I will grant that university campuses are weird places), Mamet's professor is so inept that we can hardly have any sympathy for him. I could only feel that anyone so lacking in intellectual skills or moral fiber never deserved tenure in the first place. And how did this mouse of a student suddenly become so bold? If the PC fanatics of her group could quickly bring about so drastic a change, they must have something going for them. *Oleanna* backfires, shifting our sentiments to all the wrong places.

Mamet's views of academic life seem to derive from his own experiences as a student at Goddard College back in the sixties, plus recent lurid newspaper accounts of political correctness in some American universities. It is a long time since I have run across anyone like his anti-establishment professor here. Although there are some PC students, and professors too, who are just as balmy as Mamet's, they are a small minority with little power. I have heard of no professors actually denied tenure or being fired for lack of political correctness. The attacks have mainly been on curriculum rather than on people. I have heard of individual professors being challenged in class, but if they can't stand the heat, they should stay out of the lecture hall. Disputing with authority is a tradition going back to the earliest universities; nowadays, the problem with students is more likely to be passivity than unruliness. I sometimes feel I would give a month's salary for some genuinely challenging students.

Thus, while the threat of PC tyranny on campus should not be underestimated (they all laughed at Hitler at the time of the Beer Hall Putsch), I would rate it currently at about 126 on my list of dangers to academic life. If it succeeds in destroying free thought, it will not be because of boobs like Mamet's professor and student, but of spineless administrators caving in to frivolous demands. The real drama in *Oleanna* is in the offstage tenure committee, who apparently reversed themselves overnight without any respect for the rights of the accused. Focussing on those vacillating weaklings might have given us some insight into how academic freedom is actually destroyed.

Oleanna was originally produced in Boston by Mamet's Back Bay Theatre Company, in conjunction with the American Repertory Company at Harvard. (How the academic connections proliferate!) It played off-Broadway in the fall at the Orpheum Theatre on the Lower East Side, directed by Mamet himself. William H. Macy, veteran of Mamet films, played the professor in a mannered, tense way, while Rebecca Pidgeon, Mamet's wife, played the student with lumpish monotony.

By the way, neither Mamet nor I got the M.I.T. job. Could it have been because we lacked political correctness?

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KAREN WILKIN

After the Retrospective: Matisse and Picasso

THE CLOSING OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART'S Matisse retrospective on January 19th left anyone who cares about painting feeling grateful for the show and bereft at its loss. Thoughtfully selected and intelligently installed, the exhibit allowed us to see Matisse whole, at last, to track his long evolution, savor his strengths, and come to know him not merely as a twentieth century paradigm, but as a highly idiosyncratic individual. I don't mean that Matisse's biography became an issue in the way Picasso's does when we are confronted by his works, but rather, the full complexity of Matisse's artistic personality was revealed: his refusal to settle for a single way of responding to things seen or a single way of making a picture, his protean inventiveness, his sensuality, his discipline, and much more.

Yet while our view of Matisse was enriched and clarified, some questions continued to loom as large as ever. Just where does Matisse stand in relation to Picasso, for example? As John Elderfield, the exhibition's curator, points out in a perceptive catalogue essay, Matisse has, more often than not, been defined in relation to his more flamboyant colleague and even the most partisan among us is hard put to think of one without taking the other into account. While the Matisse exhibition was on, the presence of Picasso's seminal masterpiece of 1907, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, on MoMA's ground floor, helped to keep the issue fresh, but there was still better to come. As a brilliant coda to the retrospective, Matisse and Picasso were allowed to speak for themselves in a modernist fantasy come true—a week-long, two room installation of the paintings and sculptures that quite simply define twentieth century figuration.

The list of works made you weak in the knees. The Matisses: *Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra)* (1907, Baltimore Museum of Art), *Le luxe I* (1907, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris), *Bathers with a Turtle* (1908, St. Louis Art Museum), *Bather* (1909, Museum of Modern Art, New York), *Bathers by a River* (1909-10, 1913, 1916, Art Institute of Chicago) and the relief sculptures *Backs I, II,* and *III* (1909, 1913, and 1916-17). The Picassos: *Two Nudes* (1906), *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, and the watercolor *Bathers in a Forest* (1908), all from MoMA's collection. This short-lived, dazzling assembly may ultimately have raised more questions about Picasso and Matisse than it answered, but

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it was unequivocal proof of the urgency of the direct encounter, the potency of seeing works in the flesh, without the barrier of protective glass or the filter of memory. (This should be self-evident, but the current generation of young art historians, reared in Benjamin's age of mechanical reproduction and nurtured on slides, sometimes forget how different the experience of the real thing can be.) Nuances of surface, touch, scale, and color came alive; material and metaphysical presence alike declared themselves forcefully.

To see these iconic works side by side was to see them with new eyes. New affinities, surprising similarities began to reveal themselves—between the massive forms of Picasso's pair of rosy earth mothers planted in front of a red curtain, and the swelling haunches of Matisse's *Back I*, or between his robust *Bather* of 1909, striding purposefully into an expanse of intense blue, and the equally robust *Back II*, like the bather, turning away from the viewer to merge with a simultaneously infinite and impenetrable wall.

Differences, not unexpectedly, proved as arresting as similarities. Witness the arabesque drawing of Matisse's *Blue Nude*, the barely inflected, elemental silhouettes of *Le luxe*, the voluptuous corporeality of the St. Louis bathers, the painterly austerity of the Chicago bathers, all extremely unlike one another and unlike, too, the monumental heft of Picasso's *Two Nudes* or the brittle, prismatic angles of *Les Demoiselles*. And so on. Matisse and Picasso had very individual conceptions of the body—more than one apiece, in fact, and sometimes more than one at a time, in the same picture. Aggression, lust, sensuality, and dispassionate improvisation all manifested themselves, separately and together.

Yet something inextricably connects even the most apparently disparate of these paintings and sculptures. It's not simply that they are roughly contemporaneous, made within a narrow span of time, perhaps even in response to one another, although mutual provocation and rivalry certainly were factors in Picasso and Matisse's relations, even in those early years. The two young painters probably met in the spring of 1906—Picasso was twenty-five, Matisse about a decade older, but a late starter—and visited each other's studios with some regularity after that; their connections with Gertrude and Leo Stein linked them, as well. Picasso is supposed to have begun *Les Demoiselles* at least partly as a reaction to having seen Matisse's large composition of figures in landscape, *Le bonheur de vivre* (now in the Barnes Collection), in the Salon des Indépendants in the spring of 1906, while Matisse's *Bathers with a Turtle* may have been spurred by his seeing *Les Demoiselles* in Picasso's studio in November or December of 1908.

The possibility or, more important, the likelihood of such cross-fertilization is fascinating, but the thread that connects Matisse and Picasso in these formative years is not only their awareness of each other's work. A common admiration for Cézanne linked them. His groups of bathers, rose-blue nudes by a tree-lined riverbank, are the ultimate source of everything in Elderfield's spectacular little show. The testimony of the work leaves little room for doubt, but there is

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ample documentation, as well. Matisse's attachment to the small Cézanne he owned—three female bathers, one standing, one crouching, one thigh-deep in a stream—is not only clearly reflected in his pictures, but is the stuff of art historical legend. In the crucial years in question, there was even opportunity for the two young painters to see Cézanne's work in some depth, notably at the Salon d'Automne of 1907, which included a large restrospective honoring the Aix master who had died the previous year. Cézanne provided a challenge to the two young giants of modernism and suggested possibilities of conception, structure, and approach that no other painter offered. Yet they learned quite different lessons from their chosen master and departed from him in opposite directions. Matisse took the "sensation"; Picasso, to a large extent, the appearance.

Cézanne's laboriously achieved method of suggesting volume and weight by setting touches of warm and cool color side by side resulted in enormously tense images that challenged the fundamental assumptions of Western painting. Since the Renaissance, a picture was thought of as a window into a fictitious space. Paint and the surface to which paint was applied were necessities to be overcome in the service of that fiction. Obviously eye-fooling verisimilitude was not the only or even the chief aim of painting, but it was expected that illusion would outweigh the unavoidable fact of materials. Cézanne's pictures defied such time-honored assumptions by demanding two simultaneous and contradictory kinds of perception: their delicately adjusted chromatic relationships powerfully evoked bulk and mass, while their deliberately placed patches of pigment forced awareness of the canvas as a flat surface covered with touches of a particular substance.

Like Cézanne, Matisse was acutely aware of the world around him as a place of deep space populated by fully three-dimensional objects and equally aware of the physical means with which he attempted to encapsulate his perceptions on canvas or paper. He took from Cézanne the sense of weight, of physical presence that his colored patches evoked, and made his own mission the exploration of a narrow zone between allusion and frank materiality, between deep feeling and the reconstitution of that feeling in terms of the materials of art.

Throughout his long life as a painter, Matisse looked to Cézanne's work as a touchstone of excellence, a source of inspiration and confirmation. Matisse's Fauvist pictures, regarded by their first viewers as scandalous innovations, were really heightened, super-heated versions of Cézanne's approach, and this dialogue persisted. As a formed, mature painter in his fifties and sixties, Matisse was still painting homages to his chosen mentor and wrestling with overtly Cézannian still life motifs and formats. The bathers—"Poussin done over from nature" in Cézanne's phrase—haunted Matisse until the end of his life. The celebrated cut-outs, the swimmers, blue nudes, and acrobats of Matisse's last years, are the final manifestations of this lifelong obsession; the figure paintings in the Modern's installation are among the earliest.

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Picasso was no less alert to the provocation of even unexpected sources—he absorbed and transformed everything from Toulouse-Lautrec to Carpaccio to Iberian and African sculpture before he was thirty—and no less responsive to Cézanne than Matisse was. Eventually, in tandem with Braque, Picasso derived from Cézanne the unprecedented way of thinking about and alluding to pictorial space that we call Cubism, but initially, what he took was a method of construction, a manner of rendering. Picasso's sharp-edged planes have their origins in Cézanne's staccato color shifts and detached pats of paint, but they are used for opposite purposes; far from suggesting volume and mass, Picasso's angular facetting implies the shattering of form, the penetration of masses by space. Added to what was perhaps inadvertent in Cézanne—a wrenching of forms and tipping of space that resulted from ferocious scrutiny—such construction with geometric planes became for Picasso the origin of a style.

Cézanne's evocation of an underlying but non-Platonic geometry may also have prepared both Picasso and Matisse to respond so enthusiastically to African sculpture. (Matisse, too, was an early admirer and collector of African art.) Certainly both Cézanne and tribal art make themselves felt in both artists' works of this period, most obviously in the bursting, boulder-like bodies of Picasso's *Two Nudes* and the angular, compressed anatomy of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, here still manifestations of vigorous formal imperatives, not yet hardened into the mannerism of his later years. They are aggressive pictures, harsh and demanding of attention, that make Matisse's offerings appear, while no less daring, more circumspect and introspective.

That kind of direct firsthand comparison generated the true surprises of Elderfield's installation. In the company of the Picassos, for example, Matisse's *Bathers with a Turtle*, a startling picture, a key element in the modernist enterprise when you came upon it in the retrospective, became instead the last great traditional figure painting, a picture that evoked the past as strongly as the present or what was yet to come. Giotto, whom Matisse studied on a recent trip to Italy, has almost as much to do with *Bathers with a Turtle* as Cézanne. Matisse's cherished painting of three bathers and the frescos of the Arena Chapel are equally present in the setting, and in the full-bodied women carefully poised against that expanse of blue and green. And more. The lush bodies are modelled and contained by broad pink strokes that point back to Rubens as much as ahead to Matisse's own future. The way the picture turns inward, the way the three heroic female nudes ignore the spectator and focus their attention on the turtle, faintly echoes time-honored conventions of an era when the participants in a painted narrative were expected to be wholly engrossed in their actions or states of mind.

The women of *Bathers with a Turtle* are utterly classical. These larger-than-life goddesses give credence to the theory that the subject alludes to a myth of Apollo's disguising himself as a turtle to court a nymph. (The figure on the left always makes me think of that gallery in the Louvre full of crouching Venuses.)

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They are so convincing that the extreme oddness of their relative sizes doesn't register at first—the seated figure would tower over the others, if she stood. Neither do their huge feet nor the way they carve out space for themselves by sheer insistence. Once these peculiarities begin to manifest themselves, the picture's radical invention is palpable, and yet, the sense of grandeur, of summing up of the past, is inescapable. It's a painting that closes doors. Maybe that's why I can't think of any figure painting that comes out of *Bathers by a River*. It's complete, final, unanswerable. As Frank Stella said recently. "After Matisse, the only thing that's possible is abstraction."

I suppose the only real descendant of *Bathers with a Turtle* is Matisse's own *Bathers by a River*. The central issue remains the same: how to reconcile human form and the rectangle of the canvas. The nudes of the Chicago picture are immense, heroic in scale, modelled in the manner of Cézanne with large patches of brushy rose and blue-grey. But they deconstruct as we watch. Contours loosen, drawing separates from description; the arabesque line that hints at belly and buttocks declares its primary allegiance to the arcs of stylized foliage on the left. Matisse tests the border between figure and not-figure, without ever crossing wholly into the region of not-figure, but the sense of bulk generated by these faceless, solemn women is fleeting. At any moment, they will subside into the densely painted vertical bands that imprison them on the surface of the huge canvas. The proximity of *Back II* and *Back III* (contemporary with Matisse's second and third reworkings of *Bathers by a River*) makes the instability of the painted nudes more evident. Yet like their painted sisters, the bronze figures are held against and in sheer vertical walls. Their contours are less mutable but their mass seems similarly pulled up out of a flat surface.

Seeing *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* beside *Bathers by a River* stripped away much of the accumulated history of Picasso's picture and made it newly legible. What was most unexpected was how, well, *conventional* this symbol of outrageousness looked beside Matisse's masterwork. *Les Demoiselles* can still shock. It will always have an immediate impact of radical modernity, largely for the same reasons that make it appear conventional. Picasso's women are quite intact, detached from their surroundings, contained by tight contours. They are a little papery, rather flat and dry, with their fresh pink color, but they are instantly recognizable as female nudes in a coherent, if prismatic, pictorial space. It's *because* they are so recognizable and believable that Picasso's ruptures and inconsistencies have the power to startle: the contrast between rapid hatching and smooth stroking, for example, or between the angular, column-like leg of the woman on the left and the rest of her body. Most disturbing of all, of course, are the abrupt shifts from classical allusion to archaic mask to primitive deity in the heads of the five figures. But precisely because these declarations of Picasso's ungovernable willfulness are embedded in a comprehensible, convincing, albeit stylized scheme, they read not simply as extraordinary formal inventions, but as violence done to the human figure.

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Some years ago, discussing the artists who had influenced him, Kenneth Noland described how he saw the difference between the two dominant figures of his student years: "Picasso loved depicting things," Noland said. "Matisse loved moving the stuff around on the canvas." Matisse's self-absorbed bathers wrench themselves temporarily free of the paint that generates them. Their dialogue is between the expanse of the painted surface and the momentary suggestion of fleshly weight and mass. Picasso's confrontational nudes address the difference between their reinvented anatomy and actuality, between their invented structure and the tradition of the academy.

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon could stand as the emblem of the modernist canon. Its influence has been widespread and pervasive. *Bathers by a River* has been far less influential, but during the late 1930s, it hung for an extended time in New York's Valentine Gallery, where a generation of young, ambitious painters, the future Abstract Expressionists, paid close attention to it. Yet there is nothing in the picture that can easily be appropriated; the whole history of Matisse's long engagement with the painting, the sense of effort expended and surmounted are qualities that come out of *making* and are ultimately inimitable. Even the odd, subdued color—black, white, a cold blue, warm flesh tones, and a surprising modulation from grass green to transparent viridian—seems tempered by repeated campaigns without becoming muddied or deadened. Only by recapitulating the picture's evolution could its look be approximated. Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko were deeply affected by *Bathers by a River*, but what they took from it was not a way of referring to observed reality. Rather, it was a notion of what a painting could be, the assumption that a picture's drama could reside in its making, in its structure, instead of overt reference or narrative. "After Matisse, the only thing that's left is abstraction."

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon remains perhaps the pivotal painting in twentieth century art, an unignorable, brutal announcement of new possibilities, a destruction of old values. Unlike any of Matisse's large (and to my eye, extraordinary) figure compositions of those early years, *Les Demoiselles* offered a way of alluding to observable forms that not only looked incontrovertibly novel, daring, and exciting, but could be learned and imitated. Render the figure with angles and planes, instead of curves and swelling volumes and you joined the ranks of the avant-garde. No wonder Picasso's name has become synonymous with "modern art" while Matisse's has been made to stand, absurdly, for "decorative."

No one who looked attentively at the Matisse retrospective will think of him quite in the same way again. He was not only the paragon of colorists and draughtsmen, but a staggeringly radical inventor, a more complex, more various, more overwhelming artist than even his fans suspected. Elderfield's magnificent addendum simply underlined what the retrospective abundantly proved; we must begin to judge Picasso against Matisse's standard, not the other way round.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Soundings: Thoughts in a Musical Season

As the decade of the eighties progressed to its end, those voices that once so loudly declared that revolution was at hand were, one by one, faltering or being stilled. The destiny that stalks all such movements, ones that begin by proclaiming liberation from all orthodoxies and eventually congeal into orthodoxy themselves, was consummated: the liberators were suffering from creative exhaustion and ideological bankruptcy.

In contrast, the adherents of traditional ways, though split by factionalism and faddishness, were finding a new vigor, tapping into fresh sources of vitality by rediscovering their roots in assumptions that had survived more than just the most recent onslaught of innovation. Gradually a sense of renewed possibilities took hold; the threat of repression receded, and a flurry of activity seemed to fill old sails with a redoubled wind. Only a new divisiveness, the collapse in the harsh glare of freedom of alliances forged during the prolonged stand-off—the age-old sad human weakness for rekindling feuds thought safely buried in the past—tempered the flush of optimism as the new decade proceeded.

Perhaps not coincidentally, these developments in American composition, as the chapter finally closed on serial and postserial dominance and tonality reasserted its primacy, were mirrored in political events throughout the world.

Even Pierre Boulez, once the chief scourge of the establishment, whose rallying cry "Blow up the opera houses!" stirred musical radicals everywhere thirty years ago, has been co-opted. He is reported to have accepted a commission to compose a stage work for the Berlin State Opera.

One of the currents that helped to erode the academic pillars of serial and postserial dogmatism is the composing style called minimalism. The fall season saw its symbolic absorption into the mainstream as the Metropolitan Opera staged *The Voyage*, an opera which that bastion of the twice-tried and box-office true commissioned for the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America from Philip Glass, the composer most closely associated in the popular

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mind with minimalism. As if to reinforce the significance of the premiere, the Brooklyn Academy of Music revived *Einstein on the Beach*, the theater-dance piece that solidified the maverick reputations of Glass and his collaborator, the director Robert Wilson. *Einstein* was first seen at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1976—off-season and outside the auspices of the Met's management.

The libretto of *The Voyage* is formally credited to David Henry Hwang, who won the coveted "Tony" award for his Broadway play *M. Butterfly*. But the inspiration for the opera and the "story treatment" come from Glass. He calls the opera "a celebration of the spirit of discovery." Columbus is just one of several characters in the three acts, prologue and epilogue who represent, according to Anthony Tommasini, the Met's program annotator, "all those compelled to explore, to question."

Each tableau centers on a different voyage. In the prologue, a wheelchair-bound scientist, modeled on the English physicist Stephen Hawking, muses on the power of the human intellect against the backdrop of "the music of the spheres." The first act, which takes place at the end of the Ice Age, revolves around the crash landing of a space ship on Earth. The crew variously imagines its fate as it takes "directional crystals," any two of which, reunited in the future, will point the way back to the ship's planet of origin. As the commander of the ship prepares to leave the scene, she is surrounded by natives who sweep her up in a ritual dance. The clash of cultures, so prominent a theme in the past year's scrutiny of Columbus' legacy, is suggested but quickly abandoned.

The second act shows Columbus aboard his ship at sea in 1492, dreaming of his sendoff by Queen Isabella and her court, wracked by doubt of his mission's divine purpose, and finally sighting land. The third act is set in 2092. A space ship on Earth gets ready for a launch toward the source of the first act's interplanetary trip, which is also the source of all intergalactic life, guided by the rediscovered directional crystals. The epilogue is set in 1503, as Columbus lies dying, beset by a vision of Isabella mocking him for believing his voyage would "magnify the kingdom of God." He expresses the hope that "one day / Exploration will make obsolete / Even the sins of the explorer," and is transported to the stars.

Composer and librettist seem to have embraced the debunked Columbus regnant in today's advanced thinking—the despoiler of the indigenous cultures he encounters, whose crews loot, rape, infect and murder at will—not simply because this view is making the intellectual rounds but rather in order to create, in Tommasini's words, "a genuine, tortured hero of operatic dimensions." But such a human Columbus only shakes loose the grip of the libretto's banality and the score's lofty disdain for the stage action—what Tommasini calls the music's "brazenly non-narrative, non-dramatic" character—in the final scene of Columbus' death, where the elements briefly coalesce,

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but far too late to rescue the evening. This lack of connection between music and action is paralleled by the libretto's noteworthy absence of interplay between the figures who people the stage: it is largely interior monologue, individual recollection or fantasy, and incantation to accompany moments of transition.

Glass dislikes the word "minimalism." Again according to Tommasini, Glass once characterized his style as "music of repetitive structures." Such a description suggests that the technique employed in *The Voyage* and elsewhere might resemble that of Leos Janáček, the Czech operatic composer whose *Jenůfa*, perhaps his masterpiece, has graced the Met's rather lackluster season. In fact the two methods are quite dissimilar. Both composers are firmly grounded in triadic harmony, and both begin with musical cells that are subjected to repetition and variation. But Janáček's grow, divide, ripen and recombine at a pace that challenges the ear and mind to keep up. Glass's motivic transformations and harmonic progress, on the other hand, though noticeably more varied in *The Voyage* than in some of his earlier scores, are nonetheless extremely slow.

Moreover, Janáček's vocal lines, like Glass's in not being independent melodies, are animated by speech rhythms and have a logic of their own. Glass's do not; the vocal lines are borne sluggishly on the orchestral flow, like schools of fish carried by a river's tide. Finally, much of Janáček's orchestral texture is light, sparsely voiced and often at the extremes of the instruments' registers. Glass's orchestral voices seem to cluster in the middle registers, creating a feeling of weight.

The most important distinction between the two, however, is surely in their varying intentions. The contrast is posed in two descriptive epithets, the first from Tommasini and the second from Michael Ewans, author of *Janáček's Tragic Operas*. Glass is interested in "conjuring abstract states"; Janáček's music tracks his dramas in an "intrusive" way.

Glass's salute to Columbus is not unique: he has been the subject of a number of operas. In October the Brooklyn College Opera Theater bravely and for the most part successfully took on one of them, Darius Milhaud's *Christophe Colomb*, an intricate score that does not surrender its rewards easily. Their performances, first at the Empire Center at the Egg in Albany and later at the Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, were the U.S. stage premieres of the work. Paul Claudel's libretto, heard in an able singing translation by Arnold Perry, is, as might be expected from a Catholic mystic, heavy on allegory, symbolism and the ceremonial. But a well conceived central figure emerges: to the anguish of conscience at the consequences of his ventures is added Columbus' rage and frustration when, after Isabella's death, he falls from favor and is forced to return to Spain in chains, and his

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bitterness as he lies dying in poverty. Finally he is joined in mystical union with Isabella.

It is recorded that Claudel's original libretto moved chronologically through its subject's life, and Milhaud set it that way. But in 1956, twenty-six years after the premiere, the composer decided that the "epic and visual" first part, focusing on the explorer's discoveries, and the "internal, mystical and abstract" second part, which chronicles his misfortunes, regrets and despair, got the emphasis wrong. With Claudel's assent, he reversed the acts, so that the opera as performed in Brooklyn ends with a suitably heroic lift, a triumphal *Te Deum* sung as Columbus, clad in gold raiments, lands on the shores of the New World. Apparently the college's historical revisionists were out of the room when the Opera Theater chose its performing version.

A valediction: When I learned of John Cage's death, I thought of Jean Antoine Watteau's portrait of Gilles (1719), a *commedia dell'arte* character. The figure stands slightly off to the side, and isolated from the secondary players at the bottom of the canvas, only one of whom looks in his direction. The subject appears uncomfortable in the costume for the role he has been assigned: unlike the confident Gilles that is at the center of the same artist's *Italian Comedians* (1720), the effect here is one of dressing-up and pretending. Perhaps it is the portraitist's professional attention that makes him uneasy, and that marks his features with a hint of something—whether it be scorn, resignation or melancholy—that is more elusive the harder the spectator tries to grasp it. The subject's mien is nonetheless kindly and open. There is no smile, yet the mouth suggests good humor. He looks straight out from the canvas, and the spectator, though aware that a player's game is illusion, finds his gaze very difficult to dismiss.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Glorious Trollope

IS THERE ANYTHING MORE TO SAY ABOUT TROLLOPE beyond confessing one's addiction? And doesn't that merely characterize one as a throwback or curmudgeon, resisting contemporary fevers and frets on the cutting edge of nouvelle critique (the way we live now) in favor of a simpler time when a gentleman was a gentleman and things were called by their right names? My departmental colleagues on or near the cutting edge aren't likely to spend many hours reading Trollope (the two faculty colleagues who seriously read him are a philosopher and a mathematician), and although there have been a number of solid books written about him over the past couple of decades, he remains far from the centers of critical debate. There are of course Trollope scholars, one of the foremost of whom is N. John Hall. Ten years ago he gave us a beautifully annotated edition of Trollope's letters in two volumes; now he has published an extremely readable biography.[1] It's not the sort of book that is going to make anyone reconsider his or her opinion about Trollope, but that may just be in the nature of things so far as this eminent Victorian is concerned.

One of Trollope's very best books is his autobiography (innocently titled *An Autobiography*), so a biographer is going to have to decide just how to place himself in relation to it. Mr. Hall's frequent practice, not altogether a satisfactory one I think, is to construct his own narrative by splicing together bits from Trollope's, as in the following treatment of the incipient novelist as a young post office employee sent out to investigate the delivery of letters in rural Ireland. Here is Trollope on the subject:

> I have often surprised some small country postmaster, who had never seen or heard of me before, by coming down upon him at nine in the morning, with a red coat and boots and breeches, and interrogating him as to the disposal of every letter which came into his office. And in the same guise I would ride up to farmhouses, or parsonages, or other lone residences about the country, and ask the

[1] TROLLOPE: A Biography, by *N. John Hall*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. $35.00. Three other biographies of Trollope, all of them intelligent and thorough, have appeared recently: R.H. Super's *The Chronicler of Barsetshire* (Ann Arbor, 1988), Richard Mullen's *Anthony Trollope* (London, 1990) and Victoria Glendinning's *Anthony Trollope* (New York, 1993). This makes four biographies of Trollope in a five-year span, surely sufficient for some time.

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> people how they got their letters, at what hour, and especially whether they were delivered free or at a certain charge . . . In all these visits I was, in truth, a beneficent angel to the public, bringing everywhere with me an earlier, cheaper, and much more regular delivery of letters. But not infrequently the angelic nature of my mission was imperfectly understood.

He goes on to explain how his abrupt style of interrogation often caused suspicion and consternation in the parties interrogated. Hall retells it in this manner:

> Sometimes he was a peculiar sight, dressed in red coat, boots, and breeches, swooping down at nine in the morning on a country postmaster demanding to know the disposal of every letter that arrived in his office. And often similarly attired, he would surprise farmers, parsons, lone country residents and their wives by suddenly appearing and asking questions about the delivery of their letters . . . He considered himself "a beneficent angel to the public," even though the public did not always understand how this was so.

And so on in this vein, perfectly acceptable as long as you don't compare it to, as it were, the original. When you do, you see what's been lost: the understated comedy with which Trollope portrays himself as the brash interrogator, "coming down" (Hall soups it up to "swooping down") out of nowhere; or the nice touch, quite lost in Hall, of the beneficent angel whose angelic mission is "imperfectly understood" by his audience. In the main Hall is not a very humorous writer; Trollope is often so, and that makes a difference.

Hall is however a scrupulous provider—as was Trollope himself—of the financial details surrounding each of the writer's books; and he does a good job in evoking the misery of Trollope's childhood, in tracing the course of his career in the Post Office, first in Ireland then in the West of England, and later on in following Trollope on his indefatigable travels. Among other countries Trollope visited the West Indies, the United States (five times!), Australia (twice) and New Zealand, South Africa, and Iceland (he wrote books about four of these places). Nor was there anything perfunctory about these visits: in Australia he didn't just go to New South Wales, but to all the remaining colonies including Tasmania, approaching his travels—as he did everything else—combatively:

> His sometimes circuitous routes took him thousands of miles by ship, rail, and coach; he went great distances in buggies, over the bush roads, and trails which in England would have not been considered roads; he also travelled much on horseback, sometimes managing "forty, fifty, and even as much as sixty-four miles a day";

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> he covered hundreds of miles through forests and mountains "so steep it was often impossible to sit on horseback."

In Tasmania he had himself lowered 150 feet down the mine shaft of a gold mine "with his foot in the noose of a rope," in order to explore the stalactite caves toward which he "made his way for a mile underground . . . crawling, creeping, wading in waist-deep water." At this time he was in his later fifties; a couple of decades earlier, investigating postal conditions in the West Indies, he once rode so many miles on a bad horse and saddle that, in his discomfort, he thought of giving up the project. But as he later told his brother Tom, that night he ordered two bottles of brandy, poured the contents into a large basin and sat in it. After brief agony he was in shape to proceed on his mission.[2]

This was also the way he went about his writing, up and at his desk by 5:30 A.M., a half hour spent reading over what he'd written the previous day, then two and a half hours in the attempt, usually successful, to write a page every fifteen minutes: total, ten pages—after which it was time to dress for breakfast and repair to his other job in the postal service. Not to write was not to be alive, and Trollope kept himself alive by keeping himself writing. The piles of reports he produced about how to improve conditions in this or that postal district played directly, so he claimed, into his novel writing: "If a man knows his craft with his pen, he will have learned to write without the necessity of changing his words or the form of his sentences. I had learned so to write my reports that they who read them should know what it was that I meant them to understand." Just as with the pages of a novel where, without undue fussing about word and image, character and event could be so lucidly presented as to be thoroughly understood. Once a man really got going there need be no limit to the different narratives he could keep in motion. Noting that at one point in his career he was writing two full-length novels (*Castle Richmond* and *Framley Parsonage*) at the same time, he assures us that

> when the art has been acquired, I do not see why two or three should not be well written at the same time. I have never found myself thinking much about the work that I had to do till I was doing it. I have indeed for years almost abandoned the effort to

[2] It wasn't all painful, though. In New Zealand he went one dark evening with a friend to bathe in a hot spring, already occupied by three Maori women. With pats on his back, they encouraged Trollope to come bathe, and after a time in the water he remarked to his companion, Gilbert Mair, that "he wished he had something to lean against." Whereupon Mair whispered this "to a fine young woman of splendid proportions . . . who immediately set her capacious back against him, whereat he exclaimed, 'Well, Mair, this is very delightful, don't you know, but I think I did wise in leaving Mrs. Trollope in Auckland'."

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> think, trusting myself, with the narrowest thread of a plot, to work the matter out when the pen is in my hand.

"When the art has been acquired": once you know how to do it, you'll be able to do it, and do it without undue "thinking." It brings to mind T.S. Eliot's provocative question about Shakespeare: "Did Shakespeare think anything at all"?—a question Eliot answered by asserting that Shakespeare "was preoccupied with turning human actions into poetry." Each morning Trollope preoccupied himself with turning them into prose, as naturally and effortlessly, so it seems, as did Macaulay in his great history. (Trollope praises Macaulay, in the *Autobiography*, for the assistance his example has given to writers of prose.)

Hall observes that there has been little agreement about the best and worst of Trollope's novels, pointing out by contrast that "No one thinks that *Barnaby Rudge* is Dickens's greatest work, or *Philip* Thackeray's or *Romola* George Eliot's. This may mean that, compared to theirs, Trollope's work is extraordinarily even in quality, containing relatively no peaks or valleys. But it means also that when English novelists of the period are ranked, Trollope brings up the rear, a solid fourth behind the more distinguished threesome. Both Henry James and Tolstoy agreed on this ranking, James stating that Trollope's talent "was of quality less fine than theirs"—a judgment Tolstoy evidently concurred in, although he said in 1865, after reading *The Bertrams*, that "Trollope kills me with his virtuosity. I console myself that he has his skill and I have mine." Condescension to Trollope may have reached its limit with Leavis' *The Great Tradition* in which he is dismissed as a lesser Thackeray (not that Leavis has much to say for Thackeray either) and, in a particularly demeaning sentence, is contrasted to George Eliot and Henry James who are "great novelists above the ruck of Gaskells and Trollopes and Merediths." It's that ugly word "ruck" and the assumption that Trollope and Meredith are equally undistinguished goods that especially infuriate.

Hall is not out to question anybody's ranking, and perhaps a biographer shouldn't be concerned with such matters. Trollope, though, was much concerned to explain, in the *Autobiography*, why he ranked Dickens third to Thackeray and Eliot (Dickens' characters were too stagey and artificial). In that spirit, it may be appropriate that, rather than joining the fan club of Trollopians, one should push the case for Trollope as great novelist more strongly than it is usually pushed. I would do this not by a comparison with the original genius of Dickens, but by raising the possibility that, taken in the large and over the course of years, Trollope is a more repaying novelist than either Eliot or Thackeray. This is not to deny that *Middlemarch* is a

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great book, a peak the height of which Trollope could never reach.[3] But whatever one thinks of *Daniel Deronda* (my thoughts are decidedly mixed), Eliot's earlier novels, *Silas Marner* excepted, are not things one looks forward eagerly to rereading. With Thackeray there is the peak of *Vanity Fair*, again perhaps unattainable by Trollope. But there is also the windiness and affectation of *Pendennis*, the sheer overweight of *The Newcomes*, the datedness of *Henry Esmond* and its historical furniture (Trollope thought it the best English novel ever written, superior even to *Pride and Prejudice* and *Ivanhoe*), not to mention the Thackeray novels I haven't read. What I'm arguing for is that the author of *Barchester Towers, The Last Chronicle of Barset, The Way We Live Now, The Prime Minister,* and *The Duke's Children,* along with darker horses like the gloomy *He Knew He Was Right* and the sparkling *Ayala's Angel,* plus numbers of other highly entertaining, expertly managed narratives *(The Claverings, Can You Forgive Her?, The Vicar of Bullhampton)* are enough to call for nothing less than the highest claims on behalf of their creator.

In the course of his great essay on Trollope published in 1883, the year after Trollope died, Henry James has provided probably the most astute comparison of him to his novelist contemporaries, both in England and in France. One tends to remember from the essay—because it is so often quoted—James's censuring of Trollope for his "suicidal satisfaction in reminding the reader that the story he was telling was only, after all, a make-believe." But of far more use as a rich indicator of Trollope's art are the following sentences from a very long paragraph:

> The striking thing to the critic was that his robust and patient mind had no particular bias, his imagination no light of its own. He saw things neither pictorially and grotesquely like Dickens; nor with that combined disposition to satire and to literary form which gives such "body," as they say of wine, to the manner of Thackeray; nor with anything of the philosophic, the transcendental cast—the desire to follow them to their remote relations—which we associate with the name of George Eliot. Trollope had his elements of fancy, of satire, of irony; but these qualities were not very highly developed, and he walked mainly by the light of his good sense, his clear, direct vision of the things that lay nearest, and his great natural kindness. There is something remarkably tender and friendly in his feeling about all human perplexities; he takes the good-natured, temperate, conciliatory view—the humorous view, perhaps, for the most part, yet without a touch of pessimistic prejudice.

[3] In a letter to Trollope, Eliot called his books "pleasant public gardens, where people go for amusement and, whether they think of it or not, get health as well."

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After judging that his later works do savor of some bitterness, particularly *The Way We Live Now*, James returns to positive appreciation:

> [Trollope] represents in an eminent degree this natural decorum of the English spirit, and represents it all the better that there is not in him a grain of the mawkish or the prudish. He writes, he feels, he judges like a man, talking plainly and frankly about many things, and is by no means destitute of a certain saving grace of coarseness.

The phrase that sums it all up and forms the paragraph's first sentence is rightly famous: "His great, his inestimable merit was a complete appreciation of the usual." I would argue that even while James ranks Trollope below his three English contemporaries, the very strength and justness of his claims make a case for Trollope's greatness that James never made for Dickens, or Thackeray, or George Eliot.

Trollope's "robust and patient mind," wrote James, had no "particular bias." In fact James wasn't the first to perceive this, since an unsigned notice in *The Times* some years previously had pointed out, generalizing from *He Knew He Was Right*, that Trollope's writings "have no aesthetic purpose; they mean nothing more than they say; they are not written *at* the reader; the author thinks of nothing but how his work may be made a correct copy, complete and minute." This is a move toward defining the novelist as realist. In what looks to me the most adventurous and original of recent critical books about Trollope, Walter Kendrick, using the language of post-structuralist discourse, ingeniously describes the difference between Trollope's realism and the mode of other kinds of writers such as poets, the "sensation" novelists (who were his contemporaries), and Post Office employees who make a first draft of a report with the intention of improving it subsequently:

> These writers have in common . . . that they put on paper words that are not exact—whether the form be a plot outline, an early version of a poem, or a first draft of a report. All of them are willing, then, to transform this writing by means of other writing—filling in the outline, refining meter and metaphor, polishing phrases. Such nonrealistic writers treat words as words; they deal with words in their interrelations, apart from their connections to the things they signify. For the Trollopian realist, writing is valuable only because it is necessary to make the reader's experience of the characters as similar as possible to the novelist's experience of them before he begins to write. But there is no value in intertextuality. Indeed, there is less than no value in it, because the admission of an intertextual relation does harm to the achievement of equivalence that is the goal of the whole novel business. If any participant in that

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> business considers a text as a text, then reality has been compromised. All the opponents of Trollopian realism . . . share the antirealistic habit of admitting that writing has value as writing, rather than as the pure conveyance of what is other than itself.[4]

Accordingly Kendrick understands the authorial intrusions of which Henry James complained as Trollope's attempts to "degrade" the text, the better to enhance the "equivalence" between the novelist's apprehension of reality and reality itself (Trollope knew what that was).

Even when Trollope's prose calls attention to itself for its more than usual density, the novelist assures us that in fact we really don't need his words. In an extraordinary passage from *The Prime Minister* when the villainous Ferdinand Lopez—whose machinations Trollope manages to make continuously interesting—is about to throw himself under a train, the site of his suicide is introduced this way (Lopez is at Euston Station bound presumably for Birmingham on business):

> After a while he went back into the hall and took a first-class return ticket, not for Birmingham, but for the Tenway junction. It is quite unnecessary to describe the Tenway junction, as everybody knows it.

But you must *show*, not *tell*, cries the neophyte Creative Writer, and even though everybody knows what the Tenway is like, Trollope will describe it anyway, no big deal:

> From this spot, some six or seven miles distant from London, lines diverge east, west, and north, north-east, and north-west, round the metropolis in every direction, and with direct communication with every other line in and out of London. It is a marvellous place, quite unintelligible to the uninitiated, and yet daily used by thousands who only know that when they get there, they are to do what some one tells them. The space occupied by the convergent rails seems to be sufficient for a large farm. And these rails always run one into another with sloping points, and cross passages, and mysterious meandering sidings, till it seems to the thoughtful stranger to be impossible that the best trained engine should know its own line. Here and there and around there is ever a wilderness of waggons, some loaded, some empty, some smoking with close-packed oxen, and others furlongs in length black with coals, which look as though they had been stranded there by chance, and were never destined to get again into the right path of traffic. Not a minute passes without a train going here or there, some rushing by without noticing Tenway in the least, crashing through like flashes of

[4] Walter Kendrick, *The Novel-Machine* (Baltimore, 1980), p. 44.

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> substantial lightning, and others stopping, disgorging and taking up passengers by the hundreds.

Wonderfully caught up in the place he's describing which "everybody knows," Trollope finally informs us that "over all this apparent chaos there is presiding a great genius of order," but isn't so immodest as to admit that the genius is himself. The best way succinctly to demonstrate the difference between Trollope and Dickens is to compare this passage about the Tenway junction with Dickens' equally brilliant creation of the railway junction that has replaced Staggs's Gardens in the London of *Dombey and Son*. For all that Trollope's presentation of Tenway stands out from the less memorable character of his usual prose, it still issues in what James called a "complete appreciation of the usual"—after all, everybody knows about Tenway junction. What Dickens does to the junction that's replaced Staggs's Gardens is to write it up into the noticeably unusual through paragraphs of fantastic figuration.[5]

In other words, Dickens is always noticeable in his writing, always the resourceful performer endlessly deploying his bag of tricks. By contrast Trollope brings off his effects without inviting us to be conscious of the way he writes them up. Ford Madox Ford placed him in the company of Chaucer and Jane Austen as, before all things, a "snooper," and Ford uses the testimony of Trollope's nephew, a Mr. Synge, to weave a picture of the novelist as clubman-snooper:

> Trollope was extraordinarily unnoticeable. Wherever he was, it seemed to be absolutely natural that there he should be. . . . When he entered a club smoking-room no one interrupted his conversation; when he shot no one noticed his bag. Synge said that, occasionally, when Trollope was the last member in the lounge of the old Club, St. George's Hanover Square, the waiters would put out the lights, not noticing Trollope, although he was under their eyes.[6]

Ford goes on to surmise that therefore he must have heard more "gossip"—the best gossip in the world—than any writer except perhaps Jane Austen. He calls Trollope "the greatest of all specifically

[5] "To and from the heart of this great change, all day and night, throbbing currents rushed and returned incessantly like its life's blood. . . . The very houses seemed disposed to pack up and take trips. . . . Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet achieved." (*Dombey and Son*, Chapter 15)

[6] Ford Madox Ford, *The March of Literature*, p. 789.

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English novelists," and, in one of Ford's shrewdest sentences notes that "He is less of an artist than she but he is male, and that counts." What "counts" is of course male privileges such as being allowed to snoop at the club in Hanover Square.

Style, said Robert Frost once, is the way a person carries himself toward his ideas and his deeds. In speaking of Trollope one wants to add that such carrying is done, essentially, through a narrative voice. It's doubtless unconscionably vague to speak about "voice" and how getting to recognize and love Trollope's over the course of time is such a rewarding activity. But an early reviewer of *Barchester Towers* struck the right vocal emphasis when he said that Trollope sounded "like one's father should sound." And this father was willing to put himself on the line by speaking about basic human values. Trollope said about the Pallisers—Lady Glencora and her husband Plantagenet ("Planty Pal," the Duke of Omnium, the once Prime Minister) that they were "safety-valves by which to deliver my soul." He delivered it most movingly in *The Prime Minister*, a novel which, mysteriously, was met with disdain—"worse spoken of by the press than any novel I had written," wrote Trollope regretfully in a footnote to the *Autobiography*. This book and its successor, *The Duke's Children*, seem to me to constitute the peaks of Trollope. Coming near the end of his career (1876 and 1880) they refute James's verdict on the inferiority of the later works.

Trollope resigned from the Post Office in 1867 and George Eliot worried about the consequences: "I cannot help being rather sorry . . . But it seems to me a thing greatly to be dreaded for a man that he should be in any way led to excessive writing." But Trollope lived by writing excessively and in the fifteen years left to him produced some of his very best novels. He was excessive as well about the consumption of cigars, at one point, in a letter to Eliot, generously offering to share the 8,000 cigars, which had just arrived from Cuba, with Eliot's common-law husband, G.H. Lewes. His love of hunting also remained unabated, as we learn in a passage from the *Autobiography* which gives us the Trollope voice about as clearly as we ever hear it. He tells us that he's never been able to analyze to his own satisfaction his delights in this amusement and that in fact he knows very little about hunting (remember that he begins the book by calling himself "an insignificant person the details of whose private life would naturally bear little interest to readers"):

> I am too blind to see hounds turning, and cannot therefore tell whether the fox has gone this way or that. Indeed all the notice I take of hounds is not to ride over them. My eyes are so constituted that I can never see the nature of a fence. I either follow some one, or ride at it with the full conviction that I may be going into a horse-pond or a gravel-pit. I have jumped into both one and the other. I am very heavy, and have never ridden expensive horses. I

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> am also now old for such work, being so stiff that I cannot get on to my horse without the aid of a block or a bank.

What's left then? Nothing less than everything:

> But I ride still after the same fashion, with a boy's energy determined to get ahead if it may possibly be done, hating the roads, despising young men who ride them, and with a feeling that life can not, with all her riches, have given me anything better than when I have gone through a long run to the finish, keeping a place, not of glory, but of credit, among my juniors.

Among his juniors, the novelists who came and come after him, his place is not of credit merely, but of glory.

The Aspect of Eternity

BRUCE BAWER

In *The Aspect of Eternity*, literary critic Bruce Bawer appraises the full body of work by such writers as Willa Cather, Peter Matthiessen, Doris Lessing, Flannery O'Connor, and Graham Greene. Biting, acerbic, frequently brilliant, and always entertaining, the fifteen essays in this book will prove a welcome addition to the library of any serious reader.

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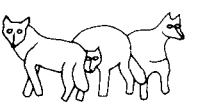

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SUSAN BALÉE

Obscure Romantics and Uneasy Victorians

IN GENERAL, I PREFER TO READ the letters and journals of literary figures rather than their biographies. Primary sources place me much closer to my subject: like a voyeur at an open window, nothing intervenes between me—the reader—and the writer *in flagrante*. His or her most personal thoughts, most intimate letters, seem written to me, and I can form my own opinions about what they mean—I don't need a scholar to interpret them for me, to drag in his own camera equipment, to *block my view*.

Worse still, scholars often crush the life out of their subjects: they seize 'em and frieze 'em, hoping to chisel out a "landmark study" that will define the celebrity for centuries (or at least for a decade or two). The biographer's own prose—too often clunky, footnote-dragging scholarspeak—fills up most of the pages, obliterating the mellifluous voice of the subject, who only gets to speak in quotes, which are then broken off and rigorously analyzed to make a point of interest *to the scholar*. Pity the artists so edited, who wind up playing the chorus to their own lives!

Fortunately, there are exceptions to this rule. Fine literary biographies exist: a few of them, like salmon swimming upstream, cross over from the dead sea of scholarly tomes into the lively pool of general interest. In recent years, in my field, I can think of three: Stanley Weintraub's *Victoria*, Peter Gay's *Freud*, and Richard Ellmann's *Oscar Wilde*. These biographies read like novels: Instead of being overshadowed by the biographer, each subject shines in his light. Like happy families, delightful biographies are all alike, at least in one sense: they all wed thorough research to stylish, lively prose.

Robert Gittings and Jo Manton's *Claire Clairmont and the Shelleys*[1] is not quite so felicitous a marriage, but what it lacks in style it gains in substance. This is a solid book, destined to become a reference point by which to compass the lives of the Shelley Circle. Best of all, Gittings and Manton render an invaluable service to the literary history of nineteenth-century England: They rescue Claire Clairmont from the margins of history and bring her center-page.

[1] CLAIRE CLAIRMONT AND THE SHELLEYS 1798–1879, by *Robert Gittings and Jo Manton*. Oxford University Press. $39.95.

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Until now, "Claire" (née Jane) Clairmont has been remembered chiefly for her connections to other, more famous lives. Her mother, a woman with a dubious past, married Mary Wollstonecraft's widower, the radical philosopher William Godwin, in 1801. She came to the marriage carrying two pieces of baggage from her mysterious past: a son and a daughter with the last name of Clairmont. Godwin had his own baggage: Fanny Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft's daughter by a previous lover; and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, his own daughter, whose difficult birth had precipitated the death of her feminist mother. By the marriage of Mrs. Clairmont and William Godwin, Mary and Claire became stepsisters.

The two girls, though close, possessed very different temperaments. Claire was "well known in the family for jokes and fun," whereas Mary was more like her mother and her half sister Fanny: serious and given to melancholy. Nevertheless, it was Mary to whom Percy Bysshe Shelley was first attracted when he met her in 1812. Shelley was then married to his first wife, Harriet, but Mary "was infinitely richer and more mature in ideas, inherited from her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, and learnt from Godwin." Shelley, smitten by her intellect combined with her striking physical beauty, was overwhelmed when she confessed her own love for him on 26 June 1814. He determined to abandon his wife and devote himself to Mary—despite the horror of the Godwins and the general censure of English society. On 28 July, in secret, they sailed for Calais. Claire, who spoke fluent French (Mary and Shelley were surprisingly poor linguists all their lives), accompanied them.

So began Claire Clairmont's role as adjunct to the stars, compounded later by her seduction of Byron, and the illegitimate daughter she bore him. Nevertheless, Shelley clearly viewed Claire as much more than his and Mary's interpreter. He became her mentor and, as this biography implies, she absorbed his principles far more profoundly than his wife ever did. Long after Victoria's reign had made the Romantics seem wild and immoral, Claire clung to the ideas first instilled in her by Shelley. Early in their liaison,

> Shelley still regarded Claire as a young pupil whose mind needed to be formed by his ideas and by reading prescribed for her, yet he had begun to treat her personally as an equal. He appreciated her liveliness and wit and enjoyed her company. Mary, six months gone in pregnancy, naturally resented this; Claire was frankly pleased that Mary's pregnancy forced her to rest so frequently, leaving herself as companion to Shelley.

Shelley and Claire spent a great deal of time together, even taking trips when Mary was too unwell to travel, but Gittings and Manton contend that theirs was only a platonic friendship. Curiously, Gittings—who writes the first part of this biography; his wife, Jo Manton,

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receives credit for the rest—takes great pains to blame Mary's genetic depression (both her mother and her half sister, Fanny Imlay—who committed suicide in 1816—suffered from severe depression) for her resentment of Claire. "It is often said," he asserts, "that Mary's feelings were caused by Claire's tactlessness or insensitivity, but the most likely cause lies in their contrasting heredity—Mary anxious and sensitive to rebuffs, Claire recklessly bold and volatile."

Although there's no doubt that Mary suffered from depression all her life, this explanation for her resentment of Claire seems superfluous. A sufficient reason already exists: Claire and Shelley enjoyed a very close relationship of some kind (knowing Shelley's devotion to free love and Claire's devotion to Shelley, this reader doesn't rule out sexual passion), and Mary was quite frankly jealous of her husband's absorption in her vivacious stepsister.

Nevertheless, whatever the nature of her liaison with Shelley, it didn't stop Claire from setting her cap for Byron in 1816. She wrote him an admiring letter, followed it with a visit to his room at the Drury Lane Theatre, and followed that with a blunt proposition that they rendezvous at an inn on the outskirts of town. Claire strikes the reader as amazingly assertive for an eighteen-year-old virgin—even one who had been schooled in free thinking by Godwin and free love by Shelley.

Byron complied, though he felt not the slightest twinge of love for Claire. As Robert Gittings puts it, "Her main drawback, in his eyes, was that she tried to extend a casual night's sexual pleasure to a long-lasting relationship." Although Byron tried to avoid her after their initial encounter, Claire still held a trump card in her hand: Shelley. The two poets admired each other's works, and Claire contrived to arrange a meeting between them in Geneva. During the interlude the poets and their consorts spent together in Switzerland, Mary Shelley conceived *Frankenstein*, and Claire conceived Byron's daughter Allegra. "Byron received the news without enthusiasm—'Is the brat mine?'" It was at this point that Shelley made a generous provision in his will for Claire and her yet-unborn child.

The next several years of Claire's life with the Shelleys are punctuated by losses, particularly by the losses of children. Mary lost three (not including miscarriages)—her first died after a few days, her daughter Clara died in infancy, her son "Wilmouse" at the age of four. Claire, who effectively lost Allegra after the child's first year, when Byron took the little girl to raise her, lost her permanently when Allegra died in her convent school at age five. A devoted mother, Claire never got over the loss of her one child, for which she blamed Byron. Her devotion to children throughout her life seems an echo of this strong maternal bond.

Other deaths blacken the border of this biography of Claire's early life. A few months after Fanny Imlay's suicide, Shelley's first wife, Harriet, also took her life. The series of deaths of children followed,

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culminating, in 1822, with Shelley's drowning off the coast of Italy. Claire was twenty-four years old, and

> Shelley, for so many years the constant friend and protector in [her] life was gone forever; she would now have to find her own way in a leaderless world. The independent spirit she prized so much was all she had to guide her.

These words end the first section of the book, and they also represent the end of most scholars' knowledge of Claire Clairmont. The following sections, which trace Claire's long career as a governess in Italy, Russia, Germany, Austria, and France, bring her to life on her own merits. These sections, written by Jo Manton, also seem to me to mark a sudden improvement in the prose style. Gittings' prose is adequate and workmanlike, but Manton's is often positively lyrical.[2] Consider her opening paragraph in Part II:

> The deaths of Allegra and Shelley left Claire a lone remnant of the Romantic Age. Her letters and journals, volatile textures of light and shade, record her battles as revolutionary in a world of reaction, servant in households of strangers, an Englishwoman abroad, a foreigner in England. She survived by a vivid response to life, learning in spite of early grief to be "happy without happiness." In the respectable middle-class world of the mid-century, she survived as a figure from a freer past, with lingering hopes of Shelley's vision: "The world's great age begins anew / The golden years return."

Claire made her living for most of her life as a teacher of languages and a governess. As any student of nineteenth-century England knows, this was virtually the only respectable career available to impoverished gentlewomen until well after mid-century. (The other career is the one Mary took up: she supported herself and her son, Percy Jr., as a hack writer.[3]) Claire actually had many gifts as a teacher: besides speaking Italian, French, German, and later Russian, fluently, she also excelled as a musician—both Byron and Shelley wrote poems about her lovely singing voice. In addition to these accomplishments, she read widely, thought boldly, and always had a

[2] In fact, it was quite a surprise to me to note on the back of the book's jacket that Gittings is also a poet. Judging by their juxtaposed styles in this biography, I would have given the poet's laurels to Manton and assumed that Gittings was a dyed-in-the-gown academic.

[3] Shelley's will could not come into effect until his father, Sir Timothy, died. The old man had never forgiven his son for abandoning his first wife and running away with Mary. However, when he died in April 1844 at the age of 90, Percy Jr. came into his estate by the laws of primogeniture, and Claire received her legacy.

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lively, outgoing manner. In general, she loved young people and enjoyed her pupils.

Her strongest trait, however, was her determination to maintain her independence. She received marriage offers from Edward Trelawny and Thomas Love Peacock, among others, but she refused to marry for security where her heart was not engaged. Instead, she remained single all her life, punctuating her solitary existence with lovers—Manton describes a fellow tutor in Russia, and a long-term "friend" who visited her during her middle years in Paris. No hard evidence corroborates these affairs, but lots of hints in her letters and journals seem to indicate that they existed.

Claire's long life as a governess, and the various landscapes in which she practiced her profession, provide the most interesting parts of this biography. The descriptions of Moscow and St. Petersburg in the 1820s are masterful; I felt as if I were reading Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* filtered through the eyes of an English contemporary. Manton is also good in placing Claire in other landscapes: Florence in the 1830s; Paris in the early 1840s. Claire, peripatetically pursuing posts all over Europe, missed some of the dramatic transformations in English sensibility. She remained a Romantic even as England—and Mary Shelley—embraced the bourgeois values of Queen Victoria. Her sympathies in 1848 were with the European revolutionaries, and her

> . . . Shelleyan response to them showed how far the England of Victoria and Albert had moved from the spirit of Claire's youth. Religion and its handmaid respectability had defeated Shelley's revolutionary hopes. During her decades in Italy, Russia, Germany, and France, Claire had become a foreigner in the now decorous land of her birth. . . . The outward observances of piety—family prayers, bowdlerized Shakespeare, the blank and silent Sabbath, the religious tracts which replaced the stories of Miss Edgeworth that her pupils had loved—all had passed her by. In some ways this was fortunate, for she remembered her adored Allegra without shame. Nor was she tempted to denounce zealously the minor faults of others. She could not share the general movement by which the English middle classes became the respectful allies of the landed gentry.

This is a wonderfully succinct analysis of the transformation in English culture from the bawdiness of the eighteenth century to the prudery of the middle-nineteenth. Shelley and Byron died in the spirit of their age, but Claire outlived the Zeitgeist that had formed all her deepest values.

In fact, she outlived almost all of the Shelley Circle except for Trelawny, who died in 1881 at the age of eighty-nine. Claire died in 1879, having spent the last decades of her life generously providing for her brother's family out of her legacy.

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This account of her life underscores her right to be taken seriously as a bona fide member of the Circle, not merely as an adjunct to Shelley, Mary, and Byron. Her own accomplishments, while less tangible than novels and poems, are none the less valuable. *Claire Clairmont and the Shelleys* offers us a Grand Tour of nineteenth-century Europe and its changing cultural landscape. Miss Clairmont, the tour guide, is absolutely first rate: I highly recommend her.

In the autumn of 1831, while Claire Clairmont was working as a governess to a Russian family residing in Italy, Victor Hugo published his masterpiece—*Notre-Dame de Paris*—in France. This is the novel that Richard Maxwell cites as the first "novel of urban mysteries," a genre that he traces from Hugo to Charles Dickens, with lots of other, and lesser, practitioners on both sides of the Channel.[4] These novels, Maxwell argues, treat the urban dweller's uneasiness about the city he inhabits. In Professor Maxwell's words,

> the situation of the city dweller in the 1830s and 1840s retains its special pathos. An irreversible process seems to be occurring. Greatest among artifacts, the metropolis eludes the grasp of the human mind; to revise a traditional dictum, the maker no longer knows what he has made.

The industrial city, crammed with more knowledge, more secrets, more *mysteries*, than any individual within its walls could possibly grasp, presented a frightening prospect to its inhabitants. How could they come to grips with their lives in the metropolis? Who could demystify the urban beast in whose belly they found themselves?

According to Maxwell, the novelist could. "The novelist would be able to *write* the city: to state for a large, often-exploited audience how and on what basis the city holds together." In order to do this, the novelist of urban mysteries would utilize allegorical figures. Maxwell cites what he considers the four major ones: labyrinths, crowds, panoramas, and paperwork. Through the use of these figures in their narratives, novelists such as Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens could interpret—and thus, demystify—the city for their readers.

This is the essence of Professor Maxwell's project in *The Mysteries of Paris and London*, but its execution is more labyrinthine than the author's favorite trope. Maxwell writes clearly about difficult theoretical concepts, but his work is so densely cluttered with references to other novels, novelists, and critics, it resembles Trafalgar Square on a Saturday in June. One wishes there had been an editor willing to act as street sweeper for Maxwell—someone who could have hung onto

[4] THE MYSTERIES OF PARIS AND LONDON, by *Richard Maxwell*. University Press of Virginia. $37.50.

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what was really essential to the argument, and thrown out what was merely the obligatory name-dropping of current literary criticism.

Let me support my objection with a little exercise in Statistics (that science invented—and beloved—by the Victorians). In the first four pages of Maxwell's book, including notes, the professor refers to no less than 53 people. They are: G.M. Reynolds, Dostoyevsky, Henry Mayhew, Gide, Nabokov, Borges, Hugo, Dickens, John Bunyan, Edgar Wind, Angus Fletcher, Paul de Man, Walter Benjamin, Baudelaire, Goethe, Ruskin, Alfred Crowquill, Richard R. Wohl, Anselm Strauss, William Hazlitt, Robert Park, Thackeray, Isaiah Berlin, Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, Donald Fanger, Louis Chevalier, Alan Trachtenberg, Leslie Fiedler, George Lippard, Christopher Prendergast, Balzac, Peter Brooks, Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, Aldo Scaglione, Michael Murrin, Mark Caldwell, Maureen Quilligan, Michel Foucault, John Milton, Stephen Fallon, E.S. Shaffer, Theresa Kelley, Tobin Siebers, Alexander Welsh, Michael Jennings, Susan Buck-Morss, Louis Althusser, Hegel, Mallarmé, Karl Kraus, and Hazard Adams.

These are more people than you need for a crowd scene in an epic; they are far too many for the first four pages of a book, even a scholarly study of prodigious scope. Because, instead of elucidating Maxwell's theme, these references to other people and other works—with all of *their* associations—begin to obfuscate it. Maxwell's' scholarship begins to bear a disturbing resemblance to its object: it becomes as difficult to grasp in all its complexity as the vast cities it describes.

That objection aside (and it could be equally applied to a number of recent literary-critical texts), *The Mysteries of Paris and London* presents some fascinating readings of important nineteenth-century novels. Maxwell leads the reader on an interesting tour of the labyrinths of Hugo's *Notre-Dame* that helps to explain the power this novel had to influence other writers. He demonstrates "the pervasiveness of Notre-Dame, its adaptability as a children's story, a set of picturesque scenes, and opera libretto or a manual for the aspiring sadist, depending on taste and demand." Hugo succeeded the novel himself, with *Les Misérables* and *Les Travailleurs de la mer*; Eugène Sue borrowed heavily from the novel with his *Les Mystères de Paris*; and G.M. Reynolds anglicized Sue with *The Mysteries of London*. Dickens, who considered Hugo the greatest French novelist of the nineteenth century, also—according to Maxwell—took inspiration from his *Notre-Dame*. Maxwell links five of Dickens' novels to this seminal French novel; they are: *Oliver Twist, The Old Curiosity Shop, Martin Chuzzlewit, Bleak House,* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood.*

This is an influence study of large dimensions, because Maxwell also traces the borrowing that went on among the novelists who succeeded Hugo. He notes, for instance, that some contemporary critics of *Bleak House* thought it sounded "disagreeably reminiscent" of Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London*—a work and an author that Dickens himself despised. A narrative loop—or labyrinth—connects these

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many novels, and Maxwell has given himself the Thesean task of leading us through it.

Richard Maxwell's particular strength, it seems to me, is his ability to perceive and explicate the most important images of the novels he examines. His study of the gallows-labyrinth "knotted together by the hangman's rope" in *Oliver Twist* seems the perfect thread by which to unravel the novel—even Oliver's last name plays on ropes.

Further, Maxwell's interest in images extends beyond word pictures, and it is heartening to see a scholarly work about the nineteenth-century novel that also examines nineteenth-century illustration. Modern editions of these novels often don't include the illustrations that originally appeared juxtaposed with the text, even though such drawings not only complemented, but were often essential to understanding the story. Maxwell, however, pays attention to the illustrations of George Cruikshank and Hablôt Browne—two of Dickens' artist-collaborators—and he devotes a chapter to Charles Meryon and his etchings of Paris—most memorable among them the gargoyle atop Notre-Dame.

Occasionally, however, the welter of references and cross-references almost overwhelms this study. Maxwell's analysis of the innumerable links between Dickens' works and the *Arabian Nights* waxes diffuse. As he says, "Dickens's involvement with the *Arabian Nights* seems both intense and superficial." So does this chapter, insofar as it appears only tangentially connected to the rest of the book. Again, one notices a similarity between the study and its object: Scheherazade was herself given to digressions.

Finally, although there is much that is meritorious in *The Mysteries of Paris and London*, there is also much that might have been pruned to make this a shapelier, and a better, book—one that could appeal to an audience outside the academy. There is no doubt that Richard Maxwell is a fine scholar, that he knows his subjects—Hugo, Dickens, Paris, London—and that he embraces them with enthusiasm. There's also no doubt that he's extremely well-read (even if he does misspell *Steven* Marcus' name), and that he speaks fluent French, and possibly also German and Italian. But somehow it's the constant exercise of his extensive knowledge that wears out the reader; what is admirable becomes baffling and then tiresome. To conclude this point, and my review, I cannot resist quoting Maxwell on George Sala:

> Sala often writes ponderously, piling sentence on sentence as though he were engaged in investigations of mind-boggling difficulty. Like the Levantine postmaster described in one of his essays, I want to scream at Sala, "Troppa scrittura!" ("Too much writing!").

I know the feeling.

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DAVID MASON

Poetry Chronicle

THERE AREN'T MANY POETS on whom one would wish greater fecundity. Poets are lucky if they can produce a handful of indelible poems in a lifetime, which is why so many collected editions weigh in with the lugubriousness of failed prizefighters. Now that James Dickey has published *The Whole Motion: Collected Poems 1945–1992*, I am tempted to wish I had been offered less.[1] At half its present bulk, this volume's merits would be much clearer than they are now. Readers wouldn't have to hack through so much verbal jungle to find the rare poetic flora within. Indeed, my first temptation was to dismiss Dickey in fury for making me work so hard, but his best poems are so good that I persevered, hoping for more.

Dickey's career has been complicated, not least because of his own publicity. A pilot in World War II and Korea, an advertising man from 1956 to 1962 (nicknamed Jingle Jim at McCann-Erickson), a professor and novelist, he has become an archetypal American character, the rebel insider, the drunken poet among the astronauts. In interviews he reports that his first book, *Into the Stone*, was written on company time, as if he—like so many of us, I suspect—wanted to break free of the very institutions that fed him. He has written good poems about war, suburban life, bow hunting, guitar picking, football, falling out of an airplane and—well—animals. When he fails, it is certainly never for want of energy.

By now it's clear that his gift has been for a narrative rather than a lyric mode. In the early pages of this volume one finds stanzas echoing Yeats, Dylan Thomas and Theodore Roethke, but few poems that work all the way through. Though Dickey attempts multiple refrains and varied stanza forms with bravado, none of these devices seems especially suited to what he is saying. In fact, this is largely true throughout his career; it is a rare Dickey poem in which I feel the form is essential. His stanzas are so frequently and arbitrarily enjambed that I often wonder why he bothered to type the extra space. But when I came across his poem called "The Performance" my quibbles about form seemed silly; here Dickey had found a clear, crisp narrative voice, telling the story of a downed pilot beheaded by the Japanese in World War II. I was riveted by the poem's stark power,

[1] THE WHOLE MOTION: Collected Poems 1945–1992, by *James Dickey*. Wesleyan University Press. $29.95.

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which Dickey rarely achieves in the early work. A few pages later he's crooning like Roethke again: "It may be the sea-moving moon / Is swayed upon waves by what I do." Such lines are both pretty and logical, but even in context they don't command much sympathy.

Dickey's second book, *Drowning With Others*, contains several good poems, including "The Lifeguard" and "The Heaven of Animals." One of my favorites, "In the Tree House at Night," is a lyrical, private drama:

> Dark climbed to us here as we climbed
> Up the nails I have hammered all day
> Through the sprained, comic rungs of the ladder
> Of broom handles, crate slats, and laths
> Foot by foot up the trunk to the branches
> Where we came out at last over lakes
>
> Of leaves, of fields disencumbered of earth
> That move with the moves of the spirit.
> Each nail that sustains us I set here;
> Each nail in the house is now steadied
> By my dead brother's huge, freckled hand.

In *Helmets* and *Buckdancer's Choice*, Dickey published some of his best work, like the animistic "Winter Trout," and "Cherrylog Road," surely one of the finest American poems about adolescent sex. Here you can also find the bizarre, frequently lovely narrative called "A Folk Singer of the Thirties," or "The Driver," which speaks of "The uneasy, lyrical skin that lies / Between death and life. . . ." "The Firebombing" braids war guilt with a man's complicated feelings about suburban life, and becomes a necessary document of its time. In this good poem one finds the beginnings of Dickey's typographical experimentation, which more or less infects the later poetry.

Good poems appear in the later books, if not with the same frequency. There is something intense and surprising in "Falling," but the stewardess plummeting to her death (the poem is based on a newspaper story) never becomes an individual, so I find it hard to feel anything more than astonishment at Dickey's *chutzpah*. "The Sheep Child" surely has one of the oddest subjects any poet ever found, but Dickey uses the occasion to give beautiful expression to feelings of violent tenderness:

> It was something like love
> From another world that seized her
> From behind, and she gave, not lifting her head
> Out of dew, without ever looking, her best
> Self to that great need. Turned loose, she dipped her
> face

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Farther into the chill of the earth, and in a sound
Of sobbing of something stumbling
Away, began, as she must do,
To carry me.

After "The Eye-Beaters" his poetry loses its narrative edge and too frequently surrenders to abstraction. Still, even his failures are ambitious, and in a handful of poems he has given us something to remember.

For the past several years Dickey has judged the Yale Series of Younger Poets contest; he awarded the 1991 prize to Nicholas Samaras for *Hands of the Saddlemaker*.[2] As Dickey says in his Foreword, the chief attraction of this promising first book is its author's broad experience. The son of a Greek Orthodox priest, Samaras has been a speechwriter for the Ugandan Democratic Party in Exile during the time of Idi Amin, and an employee of Trans World Airlines who has seen much of Europe and the Middle East. Some of that intriguing background has found its way into his poems, usually in the form of world-weary musings about identity: "I cannot help but be a citizen of transience, / always looking for the land beyond language." Given his history, it's no wonder Samaras is obsessed with identity and exile. The trouble is, such musings are dangerously close to clichés of modern experience. It's hard for most grown-ups not to feel like exiles of one sort or another.

For my own taste, the Nicholas Samaras in these poems is rather too self-absorbed. Just when he seems ready to illuminate someone else's experience or give a broader external view, he returns to himself and his all-important feelings. If he wrote like John Keats I don't suppose it would matter, but many of his verses are slack; writing of an old flame, he seems to be translating from a sentimental song book: "We made love fiercely, / we walked the Macedonian wind." If he's going to be the central figure in nearly every poem, shouldn't he give us more than this cultivated yawp? The following lines are almost a parody of Whitman:

Shirtless, mossy-chested
I breathe woodsmoke deeply,
breathe and close my eyes on its grey narcotic.
Pray that death will smell like this.
Smell this woolly and sweet.

Too often Samaras gives us the pose of estrangement rather than powerful evocations of its pain. He needs to see poems as dramas in which he is not necessarily the most important player.

[2] HANDS OF THE SADDLEMAKER, by *Nicholas Samaras*. Foreword by *James Dickey*. Yale University Press. $16.00; $9.00.

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In contrast, Roger Fanning's poems look bemusedly out at the world.[3] *The Island Itself* is an enjoyable first book, marred only by occasional workshop cuteness. "The trick," he writes, "is to be original (like a goggle-eyed virgin / in an emerald mine) but understood (like a bopfrog heart)." He views the lives of people and animals with equal curiosity, and his question about a frog in yet another poem could as well apply to a human being: ". . . is a thing so soft ever safe?" Fanning's human landscape is subtly troubled by loneliness and empty spaces. "Skagit Valley, 1980" is a fresh look at growing up; "Puddle of Catsup, Parsley Sprig" is a tough piece of verse Americana. The chief limitation to this kind of small, well-wrought poem is one of degree; he can surprise and amuse you, but he can't break your heart.

Louise Glück's two most recent collections are a study in contrasts. Her 1990 book, *Ararat*, now out in paperback, is to my mind a disaster, so dull and solipsistic that, reading it, I felt as though I had been cornered at a party by a bore moaning interminably about her rotten family.[4] When she writes "Long ago, I was wounded"—a line that frames the book—I want to say, "Get over it, for crying out loud! Read some Roger Fanning! At least when families fail him he can look at lizards and roadside cafes!" This is Glück's idea of profundity: "I'll tell you something: every day / people are dying." In an earlier poem she writes, "I was born to a vocation: / to bear witness / to the great mysteries." Well, human psychology is a great mystery, but Glück's problems don't amount to a hill of beans.

After *Ararat* I dreaded reading Glück's latest, *The Wild Iris*, but it's a far better book, perhaps her best.[5] These poems are Rilkean meditations on the things of this world, especially those found in a garden, and on God. More often than not the focus is on large issues and the vision is more generous than in her earlier books. Here, for example, is a fine poem called "Field Flowers":

> What are you saying? That you want
> eternal life? Are your thoughts really
> as compelling as all that? Certainly
> you don't look at us, don't listen to us,
> on your skin
> stain of sun, dust
> of yellow buttercups: I'm talking
> to you, you staring through
> bars of high grass shaking
> your little rattle—O

[3] THE ISLAND ITSELF, by *Roger Fanning*. Penguin Books. $10.00p.
[4] ARARAT, by *Louise Glück*. Ecco Press. $9.95p.
[5] THE WILD IRIS, by *Louise Glück*. Ecco Press. $19.95.

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the soul! the soul! Is it enough
only to look inward? Contempt
for humanity is one thing, but why
disdain the expansive
field, your gaze rising over the clear heads
of the wild buttercups into what? Your poor
idea of heaven: absence
of change. Better than earth? How
would you know, who are neither
here nor there, standing in our midst?

It's the perfect indictment of everything she wrote in *Ararat.*

The Wild Iris is not by any means a perfect collection. Glück's Rilkean posture, reinforced by the publishers when they report that she wrote the book "during a ten-week period in the summer of 1991," sometimes seems too obvious, and there are bad poems like "Love in Moonlight" side by side with good ones like "The Hawthorn Tree." Nevertheless, it signals a refreshing change in a poet who desperately needed a new direction.

The Irish poet, Medbh (it's pronounced Maeve) McGuckian, also seems to have taken Rilke to heart.[6] She's got several poems in *Marconi's Cottage* about Rilke and Paula Modersohn-Becker. But the German master's exalted meditations have a kind of lyrical clarity too often missing from McGuckian's. Like so many academics and bad poets, McGuckian seems to think lucidity beneath her. I beg to differ.

Readers seeking a cogent discussion of this book's subject matter might start with Clair Wills's review in *TLS* (July 10, 1992). What I have to say is that these poems gave me a roaring headache. Imagine pages of writing like this stanza:

I press my ten fingers to the hedges
Of my mouth, because you loved me
As if I were a bird, on the edge of the chair;
And the chair isn't mine, the chair
Without a room, the walls are yours,
Lying flat on the ground,
The acute angles of your arms and body.

Those angles are just about the only acute things in the book. I cannot understand why anyone would choose to read most of these poems if they weren't assigned. And that may explain the painful opacity of so much of the writing here; maybe McGuckianists confuse the density of her poems with intellectual pleasure. It's not that she isn't capable of writing well. One of her good poems, "East of Mozart," begins,

[6] MARCONI'S COTTAGE, by *Medbh McGuckian.* Wake Forest University Press. $8.95p.

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Snow gleams like an old leaven
In one corner of my room, a feeling
With no name in actual language,
Which perhaps does not exist except in me.

At least this is clear. I seized such moments in *Marconi's Cottage* like a castaway snatching a few drops of fresh water. It seems to me that poetry ought to offer more sustenance.

If McGuckian's poems exist to be explained, Derek Mahon's are intended to be read. His *Selected Poems* is one of the high points in the ongoing Irish renaissance.[7] Without meaning to neglect other fine poets writing now in Ireland, I think it is useful to compare Mahon to Seamus Heaney, whose guttural muse has given him so distinctive a style. Mahon is more an urban poet, and more urbane. Whatever Heaney's faults, he rarely sounds like anyone else. Mahon does sound like others, from the Continental writers he translates to MacNeice and Larkin, but he is so good that I don't mind the occasional pastiche. If you haven't read him yet, take a look at the following poems, all minor masterpieces: "The Snow Party," "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford," "The Mute Phenomena," "Derry Morning," "Knut Hamsun in Old Age" and "Courtyards in Delft." Most of these poems are pervaded by an understated political despair; they are proofs of lucidity's power.

In Mahon's work, reticence seems less a refuge than a technique, inviting the attentive involvement of the reader. I wish I could make a fuller case for his importance, but this short, early lyric will have to suffice. Its speaker is Beckett's Molloy:

Now at the end I smell the smells of spring
Where in a dark ditch I lie wintering,
And the little town only a mile away
Happy and fatuous in the light of day.
A bell tolls gently; I should start to cry
But my eyes are closed and my face dry.
I am not important and I have to die.
Strictly speaking I am already dead
But still I can hear the birds sing on over my
head.

The seventh line of that poem is haunting.

Jonathan Holden is an American poet and critic in mid-career whose work is characterized by its clarity and intelligence. *American Gothic* is his most thoughful and far-reaching collection of poems to

[7] SELECTED POEMS, by *Derek Mahon.* Viking/Gallery. $20.00.

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date.[8] On the one hand, Holden's poems are typical of the plain-spoken work one frequently finds in prairie states, promulgating an aesthetic of the ordinary in which gothic excesses have been weathered and flattened like Grant Wood's farmers. But Holden also knows that the idea of Midwestern isolation is partly mythological, that America's parenthetical coasts are related to the prairie sentence they contain by a grammar of finance; in short, Wall Street is as much his subject as the open landscape. His excellent poem called "The Parable of the Snowman" begins with cocktail-party conversation about investment rollovers—the sort of thing you can now hear in almost any American town. From these abstractions he charmingly shifts to the image of children rolling snow into the shape of a man, a playful figure of American aspirations. "Everyone had snow," the poem concludes, reminding us that not everyone has capital to invest.

Holden has divided his book into two sections, the first establishing what he means by his title and the second expanding the view from rural to urban life. In the course of this thoughtful essay, Holden gives us several fine poems: "Firefight," "Landscape with Horses," "Cancer," "Cassandra" and "Bank." His weaker poems, like "First Day of School," find too-easy ironies in their endings. "The Weatherman" contains some good moments, like these lines on the modern sublime:

> D. learned that the modern sublime
> wasn't romantic. It wasn't poetry at all,
> but a fear so theoretical
> it was as if one were a spectator
> to someone else's personal disaster
> on TV.

This response to Edmund Burke helps us understand the poem's point, but Holden's later quotations from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* are a copout, allowing him to escape resolution of the poem's dramatic conflict, especially when you remember that Wittgenstein himself repudiated these lines. I hope I've made it clear that I applaud Holden for broadening his range, but his weaker poems are compromised by failures of empathy. In "The Crash," where he attempts to portray a New York stockbroker, Holden doesn't really give us a character, but a symbol of eighties decadence and failure, as if he felt that there were something inherently wrong with the man's choice of profession. A wiser poet would have given this life more specific weight. Still, Jonathan Holden is a capable poet whose vision of America has a lot of accuracy.

Miller Williams is a poet, translator and scholar who has been quietly producing good poems and textbooks for a generation. His

[8] AMERICAN GOTHIC, by *Jonathan Holden.* The University of Georgia Press. $20.00; $9.95.

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Patterns of Poetry may be the most useful prosody book in print. Readers of his poetry have come to expect the plain, formal virtues also associated with poets like Howard Nemerov and John Ciardi, both of whom had academic careers but remained conscious of the world outside the academy. A short list of titles from Williams' many books indicates his stance toward life: *Imperfect Love, Living on the Surface*, and now *Adjusting to the Light*.[9] His is the grim amusement of one who loves life while understanding what Auden called its "limiting defect." One of his most charming characters is a young preacher whose mind wanders from his exalted ceremonial tasks to matters mundane and personal. This tension between idealism and reality, in which light is both spiritual and absent of spirit, gives the book its presiding wisdom, like a squint on a frosty day. As I read, I couldn't help feeling how unusual it was to discover so many lucid, fully-realized poems coming one after another. Here is a short one that catches some of Williams' tone; it's called "On Not Writing a Love Poem":

How do I say
what everybody says
as if it hasn't been said
by everyone?

What can I do
(considering all the dead)
that isn't banal, pretending
it hasn't been done?

There's no death,
love, birth, that isn't trite.
If all our passions are long-
discovered islands

patterned with footprints,
a Sunday tourist sight,
let people (cupping their ears)
say, "Listen: what silence."

Williams' epigrammatic poems are not as distinctive as J.V. Cunningham's or John Frederick Nims's, and a few of his dramatic monologues, like "The Stripper," don't quite catch the voice he is after within the verses, but in most of his poems formal and emotional demands are balanced with consummate skill. In "The Shrinking

[9] ADJUSTING TO THE LIGHT, by *Miller Williams*. University of Missouri Press. $16.95; $9.95.

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Lonesome Sestina" the end words spell out two short but meaningful sentences:

Time
goes
too
fast.
Come
home.

This isn't form for form's sake, but form as a small compensation, a maker's mark and the gift of his labor.

Finally, what have I praised in this cranky review? What have I attacked? Of the twenty-four books that came my way, quite a few made me suffer; perhaps that will be some consolation to poets I criticize. The writing I like least was obsessively self-involved or so opaque that reading made my temples throb. I have concluded that opacity in writing is frequently a ruse not worth falling for; lucidity, that startling and momentary view into the world, is a hard-won prize.

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DEAN FLOWER

Characters Invented and Discovered

> Egad, sir, you are a character!
> —Sidney Greenstreet in *The Maltese Falcon*

PAP FINN, THAT PARAGON OF SCURRILITY, undergoes a miraculous transformation in the fifth chapter of *Huckleberry Finn*. Heretofore a lazy ignorant alcoholic child-beating old scoundrel, Pap is persuaded to "turn over a new leaf" by a generous new judge in town who feeds him, cleans him up, and shows him the error of his ways. Pap vows to become a new man, "a man nobody wouldn't be ashamed of." Everybody cries and shakes the hand "that was the hand of a hog," Pap says, but now "it's the hand of a man that's started in on a new life."

> Then [says Huck] they tucked the old man into a beautiful room, which was the spare room, and in the night sometime he got powerful thirsty and clumb out onto the porch-roof and slid down a stanchion and traded his new coat for a jug of forty-rod [whiskey], and clumb back again and had a good old time; and towards daylight he crawled out again, drunk as a fiddler, and rolled off the porch and broke his left arm in two places and was most froze to death when somebody found him after sun-up. And when they come to look at that spare room, they had to take soundings before they could navigate it.
>
> The judge he felt kind of sore. He said he reckoned a body could reform the ole man with a shot-gun, maybe, but he didn't know no other way.

So much for the perfectibility of human nature, Twain seems to say. The *vita nuova* is a sentimental illusion; you can't eradicate the swinishness of the damned human race; Huck's "old man" typifies the Old Adam, and he will not be redeemed. One may detect some bitterness of tone here, a foreshadowing perhaps of the cynicism and misanthropy of Twain's later years. Yet the passage is funnier and more satisfying than these inferences suggest. Pap Finn is never more *himself* than in this moment of fraudulent reform. He returns to his true character—a character he never actually left—in a wonderful paratactic sentence (". . . and clumb . . . and slid . . . and traded . . . and clumb . . . and had . . . and crawled . . . and rolled . . . and broke . . .") that enacts, puts in motion, the utter intractability and impervi-

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ousness of his nature. The whole passage invites us to revel in that fact; repellent though Pap Finn's moral character may be, his literary character delights us because it fits our expectations of him so perfectly, so relentlessly. We don't *want* him to change. A perfectible Pap Finn would be a contradiction in terms. The fulfillment of his character in the world of *Huckleberry Finn* is for him to be—vigorously, rigorously—nothing other than a scoundrel.

I am reminded of Pap Finn—and of other gristly characters who refuse to change—by Bert States's stimulating new book on the theory of literary character in general, and on *Hamlet* in particular.[1] Fundamental to his argument is the principle that characters do not change: "if the probability of plot is that it will develop causally, the probability of character is that it will remain what it is. It will always be itself, or (to put it another way) what we expect it to be." States proposes that character is by its very nature "inertial force," or, in his eloquent formulation, it is "that self-integrating force, transcending change, through which (to paraphrase Nietzsche) one becomes what one already is." A character may seem to change, Hamlet may be gentle, cruel, mad north by northwest, but such behavior is better understood as "adaptation" to immediate pressure or response to immediate conflict; the character *gestalt* remains the same. Similarly, States argues that complex characters may seem to develop but in fact they do not: what develops facet by facet, trait by trait, is rather the full range of a character's nature. He likens character to a globe which the narrative turns so that successive traits or "behavioral configurations" are revealed. The spectator may be surprised by some newly-visible trait, but it quickly proves to be logical and consistent; the trait was there all along, latent in the original character rather than something new. States suggests, with a characteristically quiet irony, that "what we mean when we refer to character development is largely the development of our intimacy with a character."

The etymology of *character* bears out States's argument: it derives from the Latin *caracter*, a marking instrument, which originated in the Greek *charasso*, to engrave. So a character has come to mean the graphic sign or symbol of an identity, something written into the material, essential and unchanging, something inscribed. It seems from our usage that character must always be, by definition, so deeply engraved as to be unalterable. Indeed, States's theory is clearly founded on this conception. Yet he frequently emphasizes how problematic the process of characterization actually is. He mentions, for example, the way experienced actors find a "character-line" in the parts they play, a consistency, a logic that makes sense of paradoxical

[1] *HAMLET* AND THE CONCEPT OF CHARACTER, by *Bert O. States*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. $35.00. Early versions of two chapters first appeared in this magazine: "The Word Pictures in *Hamlet*" in Vol. XXVI, No. 3 (Autumn 1973) and "Hamlet's Older Brother" in Vol. XXXIX, No. 4 (Winter 1987).

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or contradictory traits. Laurence Olivier's wintry brooding Hamlet bears little resemblance to Mel Gibson's rough and tumble one, or to pick my own examples Basil Rathbone's elegant Sherlock Holmes, so expressive of a romantic high seriousness, differs radically from the twitchy neurotic played by Jeremy Brett on PBS. Are these really different versions of the same "character gestalt," as States would have it, or are they in fact different characters invented by their impersonators?

Readers are just as problematic, of course, just as busy with their own inventions. States emphasizes the point, even rings changes upon it: "we arrive at our impressions of character metonymically: we infer qualities that are not precisely there . . ."; we interpret others by a process of "inductive categorization"; "we develop a 'general code' or 'selective filter' respecting character; we reject 'as wrong' anything that does not fit its 'mesh' and we instantly recognize anything that does"; "our perception of character involves an involuntary mental movement toward a totalization of traits." States is a little more confident than I am that such inferencing (or categorization or filtering or totalization) operates within fixed parameters. But he demonstrates that our psychological need as readers of character is to *make* them coherent, to rationalize them into probability and consistency.

States describes a famous experiment made by Albert Michotte in which a square, moving across a blank space, collides with another square, and after a delay of one fifth of a second the other square begins to move. Michotte's subjects attested that the impression of causality—Square A makes Square B move—disappears in that fifth of a second. Bert States sees is differently:

> If you see this demonstration performed several times, the behavior of the two squares comes to have a "dependability" and you have the sense of the second square "brooding" about its having been struck by the first and then "deciding" finally to do something about it. Hence the delayed response is an "illustration of [a] character" that has "determined" it . . . Character, in this respect, is *the slack between events*. . . .

Tellingly (and amusingly), Michotte's experiment has become a miniature of Hamlet's delay as well as a neat pedagogical device. Again it's the spectator, or reader, who personifies and rationalizes the abstract construction, and creates "character" to take up the otherwise inexplicable "slack between events."

How else do we understand Hamlet, States argues, except by working to rationalize his contradictions? Hamlet treats Ophelia cruelly, virtually drives her to suicide, yet swears that "Forty-thousand brothers / Could not with all their quantity of love / Make up my sum." He ridicules Polonius at every opportunity but tells the players, "look

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you mock him not." Melancholy one moment, he is ebullient the next; consumed by emotions, he is at the same time coolly detached, self-analytical; feigning madness, he *is* mad, yet he can make it express his deepest sanity. States proposes the idea that any complex characterization presents us with such "seams," i.e. moments of apparently incongruous or inexplicable behavior that the reader/spectator must resolve. Character resides less in a set of coherent (predictable) traits than in the seams or the slack between them, gaps that we irresistibly fill. How can Hamlet say *that*, we wonder? And in answering such questions we create his essential character. States finds such characterization typical of Shakespeare, whose "algebraic" texts always leave a "gap between motive and intensity" so that we must solve for X—Iago's motive, say, or Prince Hal's. But consider some non-Shakespearian examples, miscellaneously brought to mind by States's stimulating discussion: Catherine Earnshaw's declaration, "it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now"; Bartleby the Scrivener's refrain, "I would prefer not to"; Stavrogin in *The Possessed* calmly folding his hands behind his back when he is slapped; Jake Barnes bringing Brett to Romero "like a goddam pimp" in *The Sun Also Rises*; or Mr. Kurtz's "Exterminate the brutes!" in "Heart of Darkness." One is tempted to say that the most profound and powerful moments of characterization are always "algebraic."

But the problem is more complicated than that. Individual characterization is also a function of what States calls the "super-character" of the play. Hamlet may brood on "contagion" and "offal" and the world as an "unweeded garden," but everyone else in *Hamlet* speaks of or reflects these obsessions as well, from Marcellus who is inexplicably "sick at heart" in Act I to Osric, a fopling such as "the drossy age dotes on" in Act V. In short, *Hamlet* has a character just as much as Hamlet does. As States puts it, "the play has its own state of mind, its own disposition—in a word, its own world-character through which it discourses on a particular perturbation that seems to infect and limit all actions and characters within it." Some of States's best chapters work out the implications of this idea, tracing the "genetic" relationships of "the Polonius family," of Hamlet and his father, Hamlet and Ophelia, Hamlet and Horatio, and even beyond the play itself to the "family resemblances" between Hamlet and Prince Hal in *Henry IV*. Again this strikes me as a useful, fresh way to rethink characterization. I am reminded of the way every character in a Dickens novel like *Our Mutual Friend* or *Great Expectations* is a double or alter ego or counterpart or foil of the central figure. Or the way a Faulkner novel like *As I Lay Dying* or *Absalom, Absalom* has a mind, a disposition of its own, over and above that of its focal narrator. Thus always do individual characters "overlap" one another and tend to "dissolve into" the text. Why not recognize the text itself as a super-character?

But States rejects the role of semiotician or deconstructionist, especially where mimetic characterization is concerned. If characters

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can theoretically be reduced to "no more than a collection of semes" any one of which can migrate from one pronoun to another, he wryly observes, theorists still manage to smuggle personification—the assumption of coherent human motives—back into the text:

> Even after character has been duly discarded as a container of incestuous motives, even when the genotext and the semes have been purged of character psychology, character still somehow reconstitutes itself and through a kind of "laundering" of motives becomes the host and culprit that produced the findings.

Note how vividly the "laundering" metaphor works. "There is no alternative [States concludes] . . . but to return to character, conceived as hypothetical 'real person.'" Thus ever is our impulse toward characterization irresistible, and Humpty Dumpty put back together again.

Character *per se* is not easy to discuss. Is it really separable from incident, as Henry James asked, and doesn't the scene contain the act, in Kenneth Burke's well-known "ratio"? States reminds us of these arguments from the beginning.[2] He recognizes that character may seem an old-fashioned, embarrassingly subjective category. Modern theory—including the psychoanalytic—addresses narrative, plot, structure, genre, and language far more readily than it does character. But States is a disciplined, systematic thinker. He would like to write an "anatomy of character" just as Northrop Frye wrote an *Anatomy of Criticism.* Freudian theory will not serve, of course, since it is closed to any interpretations but its own and always validates its own assumptions. Besides, States has already dismantled "Freudism" in his brilliant recent study, *The Rhetoric of Dreams.* He proposes instead a "theory of humors," purely as a descriptive hermeneutic. I think it is the only bad decision in his book. Trying to renovate what he finds in the Renaissance, chiefly in Timothy Bright and Robert Burton, States diagrams for us a "dispositional compass" with the "sanguine" (health, normalcy) at one extreme and "melancholy" (its opposite) at the other. On the other axis he puts the "choleric" man (of action) in opposition to the "phlegmatic" (dullness, torpor, death). Despite his best ingenuities ("Each humor's a thief, as Timon might say, and steals quality from its neighbors"), the scheme is too general; the result is pale fire indeed.

But when in his last chapter, "The Melancholy Dane," States returns to Robert Burton's sprawling *Anatomy of Melancholy,* and to the idea of *Hamlet* as an anatomy of character, he is nothing short of

[2] James: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" Burke, as paraphrased by States: "The *scene* contains the *act* . . . or, the action articulates explicitly what the scene contains implicitly."

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brilliant. His inert diagram of humors comes to life. He shows how Hamlet's play-long delay, and self-anatomization, resembles Burton's writing of melancholy to stave off melancholy (and endlessly revising and expanding the text he first issued in 1621, his only text being himself). He sees Hamlet in company with Proust's Marcel and Beckett's Molloy and Malone, all malingerers and maunderers, all waiting for the end:

> All three are melancholiacs in Burton's sense of melancholy as being "the character of mortality," or the psychosis brought on by an interminable awareness of loss. Indeed, in Proust the impulse to anatomize and the impulse to assimilate, or to "go home again" by mnemonic proxy . . . are fused, as they are in Burton, and (I am suggesting) in a very different way in Hamlet.

The essence of *Hamlet*, States argues, is delay—an elaborate prolongation of the interval between what Hamlet must do in Act I and what he is driven to do at last in Act V. Almost every character participates in melancholiac delay (Horatio is a significant exception), especially in that rhetorical form of prolongation States calls "thesaurism," the impulse to pile up synonyms. What happens in *Hamlet*, then, is the prolongation of a peculiarly static phenomenon. The globe of Hamlet's character turns, and so does the world of the play, and everything is anatomized— including suicide. But in a profound sense nothing changes. "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will." That is the very point States has been arguing about character from the beginning. We may learn more and more about it, but in the last analysis character refuses to be changed. It is already inscribed. Or in States's more positive terms, it is a "self-integrating force" which allows one "to become what one already is."

I would be remiss if I did not conclude by admitting that my invention (and discovery) of Bert States's character in this review has proceeded exactly along the lines he has predicted. I have made him wry, quietly ironic, stimulating, subtle, brilliant, disciplined, ingenious, amusing. I have used a "selective filter" and indulged, blithely, in a "totalization of traits," even presuming to describe his quiet irony as "characteristic." I have found innumerable "family resemblances" in the ten chapters he fathered, and have discovered a fine integrity in the way his ending echoes the beginning. By ascribing such a fixed character to him, have I not made him into a sort of Pap Finn after all? But somehow—he will understand why—I cannot even apologize.

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GARY KRIST

Hype

TO CONTEMPORARY FICTION WRITERS, hype is a lot like money—we all regard it with a certain amount of vague disapproval when one of our colleagues receives immoderate amounts of it, but none of us would complain if our own work attracted a little more of it. And why shouldn't we get our share of this apparently unlimited resource? Although the great gushes of advance money disgorged by American publishers in the 1980s have largely dried up in these tougher times, there certainly seems to be no similar curtailment of hype. Hardly a week goes by without some new book being touted as the latest "small masterpiece" or (to cite an example from the jacket copy of one of the books below) "an astonishing achievement by any standard." And, of course, what money there is left in publishers' coffers usually goes hand in hand with such hype. When Terry McMillan received several million dollars for the paperback rights to her much-hyped novel *Waiting to Exhale*, the close interrelationship of the two commodities was confirmed again. The original hype of the hardback had more than a little to do with its ability to attract the Big Reprint Money, and its attraction of Big Reprint Money only added fuel to the fires of Hype.

The larger question in all of this, however—a question of interest to anyone whose involvement with books extends beyond balance sheets and literary gossip—is how a given book's ability to generate promotional hyperbole relates to its quality. There are those out there (often writers of books with meager advertising budgets) who would claim that there is an inverse relationship between a book's hype-quotient and its inherent literary value; truly excellent books, such cynics argue, aren't given the heavy propaganda treatment because truly excellent books don't tend to pay it back with high sales among the *hoi polloi*. But the real story is much more complex than that. First of all, the kind of hype we're dealing with here is not the lowbrow variety that surrounds the publication of the next Sidney Sheldon or Danielle Steel revenue-factory. Rather what I'm talking about is middlebrow hype—the sort of breathless but high-toned sales pitch designed to hook the former English major who, though now working in some profession unrelated to literature, wants to keep a hand in, perpetually renewing the old *New York Review of Books* subscription but actually getting most of his or her poop about the latest hot books from *New York* magazine or *Vanity Fair* or *Entertainment Weekly*. The

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books that receive *this* kind of hype, as we'll see, are maddeningly difficult to generalize about. Some are very good; others are awful. Just about the only characteristic they seem to have in common, in fact, is a kind of two-tiered appeal—they generally have literary pretensions while at the same time redeeming themselves (to all but the highbrow bores) with plenty of details about the sex lives, social habits, and preferred consumer goods of the wealthier and/or more fashionable classes. Thus they can easily be turned into totems of intellectual hipness (or hip intellectualism). They identify those who carry them as members of the small elite that is smart, unstuffy, *and* in the know.

Few books in the recent history of hype have received the treatment afforded *Damage*, the first novel by British writer Josephine Hart. The story of how Knopf chief Sonny Mehta devoured the book at one sitting and found it "one of the most disturbing, gripping, etc. etc.," is already part of publishing lore. Building on Mehta's and others' enthusiasm, the book received a two-page ad spread in *The New York Times Book Review*, and was for a good while firmly entrenched on the bestseller list, rubbing shoulders with such megasellers as John Grisham's *The Firm* and Ms. Steel's own *Heartbeat*. The fact that the book, while certainly readable, was little more than an upper-class melodrama clothed in pretentious abstractions seemed lost on no one I know who actually read the thing. But the book had glamour, it revealed the dark, dark heart of the powerful and wealthy, and its author was the wife of a prominent British politician (setting off titillating speculations of autobiography). Who cared whether the book was any good?

Now comes Ms. Hart's second book—a cookie-cutter replica of the original, this time marketed under the moniker of *Sin*.[1] From the very first words of the prologue, we know that we're in the same *Damage*'d territory. Again, we hear the aching, pseudo-sophisticated drone of a narrator who has experienced emotions too horrible to contemplate: "There are many ways to have a deprived childhood. One of them is to be too lucky. . . . They say the veil that hides the future from us was woven by an angel of mercy. But what blinds us to our unpredictable past? Why are we hooded as we search amongst its ruins, trapped in the intricate web of motive and action. . . ." And so on, and so on.

What is the appeal here? The usual prurient interest in wealth, for one thing. The plot, which revolves around an evil sister and a good sister and the one-sided rivalry between them, cleaves for the most part to the city homes and country houses of the privileged class in present-day Britain. One suspects that nobody would be terribly interested in these goings-on if the characters were poor, driving Yugos rather than Maseratis and having lunch at the counter of

[1] SIN, by *Josephine Hart*. Alfred A. Knopf. $19.00.

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Marks and Sparks instead of in elegant restaurants with heavy linen tablecloths. And certainly the book does often read like a how-to guide to living as the rich do: "On either side of the fireplace two Aubusson-covered sofas face each other—in military precision as though standing guard over the low, almost black-green marble table. . . . The dining room, with its long, dark mahogany table, silver candlesticks and one huge religious painting, is a room which could easily have been a chapel. . . ."

But socioeconomic envy explains only part of the book's popularity. Ms. Hart obviously knows the intellectual insecurities of her target audience, and she is careful to disguise her book's more blatant voyeuristic tendencies in the trappings of a high literary fable, in which sonorous words like "love" and "sin" and "goodness" can be combined and recombined in a rough simulation of profundity. Thus, her readers can devour this little soap opera and yet not feel bad about themselves in the morning. *Sin* is about Good and Evil, after all, so it must be Literature.

A book that exceeded even *Sin* and *Damage* on the hype-meter was another Knopf novel—*The Secret History* by Donna Tartt.[2] This property, too, elbowed its way onto the bestseller lists, and generated very much the same kind of buzz as Hart's books did. The difference, however, is that *The Secret History* is actually good. Granted, it's not flawless, and it too descends ultimately into melodrama and bathos, but for most of its 524 pages it does what good books must do—signify as much in small moments as in big ones. To be honest, I wished for fewer big moments in the book, because it was only when she was trying for a grand flourish that Ms. Tartt's hand seemed less than sure.

The book centers on a group of students at a Bennington-like university who, drunk on the highfalutin teachings of their classics professor (as well as a few controlled substances), manage to get themselves into deep trouble by committing a couple of murders. They are a curious set of characters—fond of wearing pince-nez and carrying kerosene lanterns (because they dislike electric light) and making comments like "Of course, [Milton] wrote a not inconsiderable amount of poetry in Latin"—and they never become quite real, except perhaps for the narrator, Richard, a scholarship boy from California who goes to great pains to conceal his banal, middle-class upbringing. But anyone who remembers the callow pretensions of undergraduate life, not to mention the tangled skein of petty jealousies, sexual tensions, and power struggles that tie together any post-adolescent clique, will find much to admire here. Tartt creates this closed and rarefied world with affectionate precision, inspiring a keen nostalgia for those self-important days of college dormitories, clove

[2] THE SECRET HISTORY, by *Donna Tartt.* Alfred A. Knopf. $23.00.

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cigarettes, and late-night arguments over the relative merits of Rimbaud and Baudelaire.

Here again we have a highly affected tone of sophistication, as well as a naked fascination with wealth and its trappings. These characters love to wear expensive ties and call each other "old man" and eat long restaurant lunches with multiple bottles of Taittinger—as if they were all yearning to re-revisit Brideshead, from which much of their preferred imagery seems to be drawn. But unlike Josephine Hart, whose fictional world is built of generalities, Donna Tartt keeps the world of *The Secret History* securely tethered to the concrete; its depths, where they exist, are genuine rather than illusory, based on the hard foundations of character and situation rather than some sly manipulation of abstract nouns. And if the reader occasionally has trouble suspending disbelief (particularly at the book's violent ending, which seems to me imposed, even trumped up), that doesn't do much serious harm to what is really an accomplished, engrossing novel. Donna Tartt's second book, whenever it arrives, will definitely be worth looking at seriously.

I'm not so sure the same thing can be said about Mark Leyner's next book, at least if *Et Tu, Babe*[3] is any indication. Talk about hype, this book contains its own ecstatic promotional material: "ET TU, BABE—a master jam of relentless humor and indeterminate trajectories—teeming with creatures and the burlesque of their virulent lives—will undoubtedly be, page by page and line by line, the most entertaining book that Harmony has ever published." And that excerpt from page 4 is only the beginning. By the last page of the book, Leyner is taking his appeal directly to the people: "Help disseminate the incendiary words of this visionary warrior by ordering additional copies of Mark Leyner's majestic master works for your family, friends and co-workers. Available at Your Local Bookstore." Who needs a publicist when the book sells itself like this?

But *Et Tu, Babe* does have a publicist, at least judging from the fistful of press releases, newspaper articles, and tour schedules that arrived with the book in the mail. From these I learned that Leyner's earlier works—*I Smell Esther Williams* and *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*—had made him a cult author on college campuses around the nation, but that *Et Tu* was now going to be his breakout book. And to a certain extent, that's exactly what it has been. In fact, *The New York Times Magazine* ran a cover story on Leyner, proclaiming him (with appropriate self-protecting irony) "The Best Built Comic Novelist in America."

Leyner, however, has been one step ahead of the hypemeisters all along. The conceit of *Et Tu* is that Leyner's first two novels already catapulted their author to the heights of literary celebrity. So famous

[3] ET TU, BABE, by *Mark Leyner*. Harmony Books. $17.00.

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has he become, indeed, that he now employs an entire staff of bodyguards, administrators, and handlers (Team Leyner) to manage the great insatiable beast that is his reputation. Living together in a large compound protected by electrified fences, they all spend their days lining up product endorsements, answering calls from fans on the toll-free telephone line (1-800-T-LEYNER), and generally trying to maintain some control over the world's adoration of the macho, muscular, mind-bogglingly magnificent god who employs them. Here's a typical passage: "Today my marble citadel looms high above the asphalt, which is littered with the sun-bleached skeletons of my enemies. My dog Carmella wears a gold Rolex just above each of her four paws. I'm often seen dining at Spago, L.A.'s enduringly glamour-packed eatery, or strutting around Yemen in a full-length ermine coat, a hooker on each arm. Just yesterday, I was invited by ABC's 'The American Sportsman' to go to Australia to hunt bandicoots with aboriginal boomerangs along with Ken Follett and Whitley Streiber." And this excerpt doesn't even include any of the massive sexual boasts, or the groveling testimonials put in the mouths of people like Jessica Hahn, Carl Sagan, and Ron Howard ("I don't know if other men had this experience, but Leyner made me feel really small physically, really stupid, and really sexually inadequate. But it was still so cool being with him!").

Well, this is all very post-modern, and I know we are supposed to take it as some kind of penetrating satire on the MTV-infested, style-over-substance-plagued, sex-drug-and-violence-crazed world of the 1990s, but frankly I think that Mark Leyner just gets a thrill out of imagining himself a celebrity stud. He reminds me of that boy in high school (it was always a boy, of course) who would incessantly make reference to his own sexual and intellectual prowess, thinking that he was being witty in doing so, but actually revealing a bit more about his own sloppy yearnings than he realized. Okay, there's a good bit of creative energy at work in *Et Tu, Babe*, but I ultimately found the book tiresome. Such strenuous exertions rarely make good satire, which should seem effortless; this book is anything but effortless. On the other hand, if your idea of trenchant social satire is an author bragging about the size of his own scrotum, then maybe this is the perfect book for you.

We get more genital boasts in *Live from Golgotha*,[4] this time from Gore Vidal—or rather from his protagonist Timothy, self-described possessor of "golden hyacinthine curls and cornflower-blue, forget-me-not eyes and the largest dick in our part of Asia Minor." That claim, however, proves to be no more immodest than those put forth by the book's publicists. Although *Live from Golgotha* had a rather odd prepublication history (Vidal refused to have advance review copies

[4] LIVE FROM GOLGOTHA, by *Gore Vidal.* Random House. $22.00.

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sent to anyone except for a single gay publication), it has subsequently been hyped in a more traditional manner—a manner consistent with the prominence of the book's author, at least.

Before going further, I should mention that I am an unapologetic fan of Gore Vidal. I regard his series of novels on American history, particularly *Lincoln* and *Washington, D.C.*, as among the most impressive and healthily subversive achievements in contemporary fiction. But there is another strain in his writing that I have just never liked—his so-called "satiric comedies" (*Myra Breckinridge, Duluth*, and, most egregious of all, *Myron*), which strike me as overdone, uncertain of purpose, and just not very funny. *Live from Golgotha* is the latest example of this other kind of Vidal novel, and although it is certainly an improvement on most of its predecessors (excepting the atypically delightful *Kalki*), it still strikes me as unworthy of Vidal.

Here's what we're expected to find amusing in this book: Jesus Christ, having actually escaped crucifixion by double-crossing Judas at Gethsemane, has been transported (via a new technology developed by GE) to the late twentieth century, where, as Marvin Wasserstein, a computer hacker and Zionist terrorist, he attempts to rewrite the history of Christianity to annihilate the perversion of his teachings propagated under that name by St. Paul. Timothy, our hero (also later a saint, though now merely St. Paul's assistant and concubine) is approached by a GE official from the future in an attempt to foil this plot, by having Timothy write his own version of the Gospel (those by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, you see, have been retroactively tampered with by Jesus/Marvin the Hacker). Meanwhile, there's also a plan to send a TV crew back to Golgotha to televise the crucifixion live on NBC—a plan that has its own inherent problems, since the man on the cross is (was?) not Jesus, remember, but rather the double-crossed Judas, who is far too overweight to be acceptable to twentieth-century TV audiences as the Son of God.

Anyway, the book is supposed to be the actual text of Timothy's Gospel, though there is much evidence that it too has been distorted by meddling minds from the future. The resulting confusion leads to passages like this one, in which Timothy is describing one of St. Paul's on-the-road fundraising gatherings in Ephesus:

> An old lady stood up. She was gaunt, ill groomed. "We have been waiting patiently—lo! these many years." My hands started to sweat. The one question that we always dreaded was about to be put into orbit yet again. "I and my friends who first brought me to Jesus, believed Him when He said that He—as the bona fide Messiah—would return to us while we were still alive. Well, my friends have long since crossed the shining river and I am barely clinging to the flotsam and jetsam here by de ribberside. So could you kindly share with us His latest adjusted time of arrival?"
>
> "There was, madam, no agreed-on timetable when Our Lord left

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> us to make His preparations in His Father's mansion with its many homes, tastefully appointed with Samian drapes." He stared at Priscilla's pumpkin-colored curtains. "Nay!" Saint [Paul] exclaimed, disguising a yawn as he yawned. "Verily," he added; and did a two-step to the left.

"Here by the ribberside"? "Tastefully appointed with Samian drapes"? St. Paul doing the old soft-shoe? Just what exactly is being lampooned here? Contemporary culture? Christianity? I'm not sure even Vidal knows what he wants to say with such throwaway bits of absurdity. It seems clear that he intends to sound a few of his signature themes here—how the writers of history have more power than the players of history, how seminal events are inevitably reinterpreted to serve the purposes of the reinterpreters—but the satire in *Live from Golgotha* is all over the map. As a result, the book comes off as lame and sophomoric, hinting at a desperation to entertain at all cost. One can only hope that Vidal is merely amusing himself here between more worthwhile projects.

On the other end of the dignity scale stands Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*,[5] a book of such measured gravity that it seems forever teetering on the edge of ponderousness. The novel, Ondaatje's fourth, was co-winner of the 1992 Booker Prize, thus earning itself the kind of hype all authors yearn for—the kind that brings with it the imprimatur of the highest literary authorities. And in this case, at least, those authorities have bestowed their earnest approval upon a worthy recipient. *The English Patient*, certainly not an easy sell for Knopf's promotion department, is rich and complex, and just elusive enough in its themes to linger troublingly in the mind.

The book presents us with a rather eccentric mix of characters—a shell-shocked Canadian nurse, a dangerously burned older man of dubious nationality, an Italian thief, and a Sikh soldier—all brought together in a half-ruined Tuscan villa in the hills north of Florence. It is near the end of World War II; the Germans have recently evacuated, leaving behind a slew of mines and unexploded bombs, all of which the Sikh, a trained sapper (bomb disposal expert), is supposed to be dismantling. The nurse, meanwhile, is caring for the burned man—the "English Patient" of the title—while the thief, an old friend of the nurse's father, spends his nights pilfering food, wine, and other necessities from the surrounding countryside.

By isolating these four characters in the closed world of the remote villa, Ondaatje is able to play out their evolving interrelationships almost as a kind of science experiment. They are all brooding, intensely private individuals, freighted with secrets and past sorrows, but in the close proximity of the villa they end up revealing them-

[5] THE ENGLISH PATIENT, by *Michael Ondaatje*. Alfred A. Knopf. $21.00.

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selves in unexpected ways, entangling themselves more and more complexly in the emotional life of the others. Eventually they do find a manner of refuge in each other, but it doesn't last very long. Hiroshima and the end of the war intervene, sending them off again into their respective opacities.

Ondaatje renders the corners and recesses of this tableau with a powerful prose style. He writes with striking metaphoric richness, and although his language occasionally succumbs to poetic excess, its artificiality is arguably appropriate to the hothouse situation he has created here. If I have one complaint with the book, it is that there is an unfortunate sameness to the quality of consciousness displayed by all four of the characters. Ondaatje has gone to great lengths to differentiate their circumstances (they carry the experiential baggage of three separate continents, after all), and yet their interior lives are remarkably similar in texture—as if all four merely represented different quadrants of the author's own psychological map. It's not an overwhelming problem, but it *is* a nagging one, planting little seeds of disbelief that undermine the authenticity of Ondaatje's fictional world. Too often one wonders if the quartet of voices in *The English Patient*, far from presenting a range of sensibilities, isn't really just a chorus of one.

But Ondaatje's accomplishment here is significant, and certainly worthy of the buzz it has generated among brows of all altitudes. As I've been writing this, the book has edged its way onto several bestseller lists. Sometimes, it would seem, there is justice in the publishing world after all.

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TOM WILHELMUS

Time and Distance

IN *THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA*, the animals say to Nietzsche's philosopher-mystic:

> "Look, we know what you teach: that all things return forever, and we along with them, and that we have already been here an infinite number of times, and all things along with us."

According to Milan Kundera, this "mad myth" is Nietzsche's means of forcing us to contemplate the horror as well as the beauty and sublimity of life's events in a way which prevents our overlooking them because they are so fleeting. Without some such concept—that an event may return again and again to haunt us—"We would need take no more note of it than of a war between two African kingdoms in the fourteenth century, a war that altered nothing in the destiny of the world, even if a hundred thousand blacks perished in excruciating torment" (*The Unbearable Lightness of Being*). Repetition, recurrence, the myth of eternal return show the weight of history and create the awareness that life has significance and depth. In some fashion, this fact is illustrated in each of the works which follow. Each is concerned with time, and each creates perspective and distance. Each also deals with recurrence, without which time itself is only duration.

The first work, *The Famished Road*[1] by Nigerian Ben Okri, won the Booker Prize in 1991. It is an unusual novel which could appeal to whatever politically correct feelings we are suffering from at the moment. For the first 250 unrelentingly paratactic pages, simple sentence followed simple sentence, scene followed simple scene, nothing connected, nothing was subordinated, and every experience seemed as important as every other. And I thought political correctness might well be the point. Moreover, the narrator jumped so freely from realistic passages depicting African village life into surrealist passages of fantasy and dream that to me they exhibited a blurred—and possibly primitive?—inability to separate fact from fiction. Yet I should have known: important works are not distinguished by how you read but how they require you to read them by their standards. And now I'm convinced that *The Famished Road* displays immense integrity in doing what it does.

[1] THE FAMISHED ROAD, by *Ben Okri*. Doubleday. $22.50.

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Here, now, is what I think is going on. In Azaro, his child narrator, Okri has created a naive consciousness removed from prejudice and able to comment on events from a fresh and, presumably, natural point of view. Such devices are not new in literature (a similar narrator occurs in Grass's *The Tin Drum* as the dust jacket points out). And in this novel, the device allows us to experience the wonder Azaro discovers in his own childhood while observing for ourselves an all-too-familiar pattern of exploitation, industrialization, and environmental ruin that is encroaching on his family because of Africa's postcolonial history.

Similarly, Okri's use of the Yoruba myth of the *abiku* or spirit-child allows us to compare the family's present cruel circumstances to an ideal that lies beyond them. Azaro's (his name is short for "Lazarus") awareness that he is a spirit-child and only a temporary resident on the earth, who may return to his origins at any time if the real world proves too heartless, gives the novel much of its poignancy and motivation. "There was not one" among the *abiku*, says the opening, "who looked forward to being born." They disliked the "rigours of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying, and the amazing indifference of the Living in the midst of simple beauties of the universe."

Much of the stylistic difficulty of the first half of the novel results from Okri's attempt to dramatize this gulf between the ideal and the real and from his desire to present Azaro's emerging consciousness alongside a community's emerging sense of modern social and political life. Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, and just as Azaro's attention swings from family to the road outside, from village to the surrounding forest, from reality to dream, the villagers also struggle to reconcile the present with the fetishistic past.

Such experiences are common to most emerging cultures and along with modernization a new dream, based on personal achievement, captures the village's interest. Thus, Azaro's father's improbable ambition to become first a boxer and then a politician constitutes an effort to defeat the existing political parties, at the time divided in self-interest and ignoring the needs of the poor: "He conjured an image of a country in which he was the invincible ruler and in which every citizen must be completely aware of what is going on in the world, be versed in tribal, national, continental, and international events, history, poetry, and science," and to aid him in his quest he demands Azaro must learn to read—philosophy, politics, anatomy, sciences, astrology, Chinese medicine, Greek and Roman classics, the Bible, the cabbala, the *Arabian Nights*, classical Spanish love poetry and retellings of the lives of Shaka the Zulu and Sundiata the beast." For a while this bizarre conviction brings hope to the community—and makes the second half of the book stylistically and intellectually more interesting as well. But ultimately, it seems, the myth of personal

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accomplishment will fail because no amount of personal knowledge or courage will completely solve all the earth's contradictions.

As it happens, however, the spirit-child myth is able to include this paradox: that it is important to rebel against the past and to know one never escapes it. At the beginning of the last chapter, the narrator explains that rebellion introduces ideas about "nations, civilizations, revolutions, art forms, experiments" that are not new though "they are perceived as new" because they come to us without the visible "marks of their recurrence," a fact which makes personal achievement both tragic and absurd. It does, however, represent a "cry into being, scorched by the strange ecstasy of the will ascending to say yes to destiny and illumination." So that when Azaro's father fails his actions seem heroic though they are ridiculous as well.

A more humanizing depiction of the contradictions among life, recurrence, knowledge, and will (outside of Nietzsche) would be hard to find. I have read that Okri derives both his image of the famished road and the spirit-child from the writings of Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Laureate. And Soyinka himself is known for the subtle interweaving of Yoruba mythology with other African and European literary models and ideas. Moreover, Okri, though Nigerian, is not Yoruban, a fact which argues that his choice of mythology was made on aesthetic rather than racial grounds. It does not matter. His use of time and recurrence is eloquent, full of integrity, and comprehensive though it may not be entirely new.

All fictions are concerned with time and create perspective or distance. Not all fictions, however, require an elaborate superstructure of history and myth to do so. In Doris Lessing's new collection of stories and sketches, *The Real Thing*,[2] our awareness of these qualities arises more from our perceptions of the author herself than of her subject matter. That is, unlike a number of her other more recent fictions which rely heavily on feminist ideology, apocalyptic futurism, Sufi mysticism, or science fiction, Doris Lessing's manner in this volume has become more restrained and realistic. There is even something self-mocking in many of the stories, enough to suggest that she may be thinking about her own old age though I don't mean to suggest that her anger over the absurdities, foibles, and injustices of modern urban life is any less fierce. Rather the persona of an aging woman in contemporary London may be a means of providing perspective on what she observes. "Astonishing events," may therefore lurk in a quiet outing at the zoo, which then may be interpreted "anthropologically or not, according to taste" (from "Pleasures of the Park").

Her themes nonetheless are the familiar ones for Lessing readers. In the first story, "Debbie and Julie," a runaway finds shelter during

[2] THE REAL THING, by *Doris Lessing*. HarperCollins. $20.00.

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her pregnancy with a female companion who gives her courage to have the baby on her own—a statement about feminist solidarity and personal independence. "Sparrows" talks about how youngsters come to reaffirm their parents' habits of "nesting" no matter how independent they have become. "Womb Ward" addresses the multiple ironies of a room full of women waiting for hysterectomies in a common hospital setting. "Casualty" portrays events in an urban medical emergency center. "The Mother of the Child in Question" talks about the pain of coming to terms with a child who is mentally handicapped. Other, less serious stories address the problems of traffic jams, literary luncheons, amicable divorces, and nouvelle cuisine. All address the problems of living in contemporary London amid the breakdown of civility and civil services and changes in social and sexual mores.

Doris Lessing is, after all, one of the century's great social observers, as daunting a witness as Graham Greene in speaking both personally and for the public good. In this light it is significant that Lessing was thirty when she moved to England from Rhodesia in 1949 and now has lived in London for over forty years. Her sense of history and historical change deepen the perspective in this collection, first published in England with the title *London Observed.*

Nonetheless, it is not the careful and objective description but the quixotic personal reflection which provides her greatest insights. "In Defense of the Underground" describes a trip from the suburbs to central London and shows how London has changed. However, an oblique reference to "a sci-fi story about the planet where suns and moons appear only every so many years" reminds us how in recent years the author might have dealt with such changes apocalyptically. In this case, however, the mood is more tolerant, and London is said to have "sunsets" which are "to say the least, satisfactory" for an observer of her age. Such self-irony creates a richly textured discourse throughout *The Real Thing.* Humane and intelligently observant, it acknowledges the past and one's distance from it in order to do justice to the present.

The type of recurrence desired and, in fact, portrayed in Susan Sontag's *The Volcano Lover*[3]—subtitled a "romance"— is announced in the prologue. History is a "flea market" which one enters simply to play a lighthearted "game of recognitions." Beyond that one doesn't "have anything in mind." What recurs, what one collects from history, whatever gains significance is what floats up out of the past and has no particular pattern except what appeals to the narrator's interest. That is not to say that it lacks focus, but its drama has less to do with the represented events than with meaning in an era, the present, in which we are skeptical that meaning may ever be found. Such a situation may be both serious and comic together. One unnamed reviewer in

[3] THE VOLCANO LOVER: A Romance, by *Susan Sontag.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $22.00.

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the *Kirkus Reviews* has, in almost the same breath, called Sontag "our preeminent belletrist" and *The Volcano Lover* a "Postmodern potboiler" in the manner of Umberto Eco and A.S. Byatt. The observation may be apt, but among writers of intellectual potboilers Sontag betrays less of a sense of fun.

Ostensibly, the novel is about an eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century love triangle among Sir William Hamilton, English ambassador to the court of Naples, his second wife, Emma, and the naval hero Lord Nelson. But the choice of subject matter is at once pointed and pointless. Where one enters the flea market of the past is irrelevant, and it may even be true that *The Volcano Lover* originated in Sontag's admiration for the Laurence Olivier-Vivien Leigh movie, *That Hamilton Woman.* In any case, every subject has already been done. Hence the obliquity of postmodern fiction: one has only the contingent freedom to treat a subject (again) according to one's own lights and interests.

Like John Fowles's narrator in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Sontag's narrator freely compares the present to the past. But her tone is more austere and abstract. When the poet Goethe visits the Hamiltons in Naples (on his "Italian Journey") he is "a stony guest," a reminder to his companions that there is another, "more serious way of experiencing" life. His attitude makes him seem "pretentious, overbearing, humorless, aggressive, condescending. A monster of egotism." "Alas," comments the narrator, "he's also the real thing." Implied in such statements is a belief that if one does write about such events, one must do so in a way that is itself more serious. If nothing else, Sontag's manner reminds me of a letter from Conrad to Edward Garnett in which the author claimed he had put enough action into *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* to make it appealing to the man in the street though his own interest lay totally elsewhere.

Where does Susan Sontag's interest lie? Partly in collecting ideas and attitudes from the past and meditating on their significance. One can glimpse her approach in an episode, otherwise insignificant, when Hamilton's cousin, William Beckford, comes to visit the ambassador and his first wife, Catherine, in Naples. Heretofore, the relationship between the ambassador and his wife has been described as distant. He is aristocratic and intellectual. She is proper, prosperous, and devoted. But she is also susceptible: asthmatic, in failing health, and emotional. When Beckford arrives, he immediately establishes an intense emotional bond with her even though he is several years her junior. Their love is passionate, though chaste, and ends wistfully though it provides Catherine with final emotional fulfillment unavailable in her marriage.

In fact, Beckford's relationship with Catherine contributes little to the progress of the novel. Beckford (an actual personage) is an historical accident, a flea market bauble, who is useful only to mirror one of the author's interests in the literary conventions of the new

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Romantic era. A noteworthy eccentric, creator of the early Gothic novel *Vathek* and an extravagantly decorated estate, Fonthill, Beckford at the time of his visit had been fleeing the ramifications of a homosexual affair. Yet it is not the scandal that Sontag is interested in but rather the playing off against one another of types represented by a remote, intellectual husband and an egotistically self-absorbed Romantic voluptuary and a susceptible wife. In fact, it is the same situation which exists in Goethe's *Werther*, and one of the first remarks Beckford makes to Catherine is about that novel.

The remainder of *The Volcano Lover* displays a similar lack of interest in events and a similar interest in literary-historical byplay. Of the famous affair between Nelson and Emma Hamilton, Sontag seems interested only in demythologizing the notorious couple. Even this approach, however, seems like an opportunity to illustrate the theory that eighteenth-century painting "showed suffering with decorum, dignity in the midst of horror" and generally chose not to give greatness "a mean or vulgar appearance," whereas today "the significant moment is the one that disturbs us the most." This interest in aesthetic theory (as well as in flea markets) begets an interest in the temperament and motives of collecting, whether the collector is like Sir William, patiently collecting art works, wives, and volcanic rocks, or anyone who acquires the habit of treating life as a spectacle—present author included. This discussion also provides the author with the opportunity to discuss what happens when the one collected participates in her own "objectification," as in Sontag's discussion of the theatrical "attitudes" or tableaux vivants in which Emma portrays famous women from history for the entertainment of her guests.

When she is not meditating on aesthetic matters, the most moving sections of Sontag's novel are those describing Nelson's brutal suppression of the Neapolitan Republic which enjoyed a brief existence during the French Revolution. Here we are reminded of the eloquence of Sontag's antiwar sentiments during the Vietnam era. Nonetheless, these episodes also allow the author to engage in another startling bit of imaginative-historical "fun" when Scarpia, a character from the opera *Tosca*, appears to play a villain in this episode of the "romance."

At the end, abandoning all pretense of verisimilitude, Sontag creates five monologues—one by a living person, four by posthumous voices from history—with which to close the novel. Four of the speakers, Sir William, Catherine, Emma, and Emma's mother, all seem to want to rationalize their behavior in the course of the action. The fifth, and last, Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel, one of the Republicans murdered by Nelson, passes final judgment on the principal characters. Her appearance seems a gratuitous afterthought, though not without interest, like a trinket from a flea market.

Finally, when it originally came out—in Czechoslovakia in 1965—

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the publication of Kundera's *The Joke*,[4] must have seemed like a miracle, though with the crackdown following the Prague Spring three years later, it was one of the first works suppressed and its author banned. In the space remaining, I cannot treat the details that have made the new "definitive" version of *The Joke* necessary. But since the recent events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, it may be time to re-read the novel anyway, for in the interim, history has played an even greater joke on Communism itself, and Kundera's reflections may provide a hint as to why it occurred.

The novel begins as its principal character Ludvik stands at a crossroads in a small Moravian village where he grew up on the day before a festival celebrating the traditional Ride of the Kings, a folk ritual from the remote past. Ludvik, however, has come home primarily to carry out a private act of revenge against someone who had played an important role in the most significant event of his life—his expulsion from the university and from the Party for playing a stupid, adolescent joke. The joke had consisted of sending a postcard with some anti-Party slogans on it to a girl he was courting, and Ludvik means to cuckold the party official who had an opportunity to prevent Ludvik's expulsion but who had engineered it instead. In the town he also sees people from his youth whom he had left when as a student he went to Prague.

Actually, three types of history are present in Ludvik's situation: personal, political, and Moravian. The latter includes the folk traditions inherent in the Ride of the Kings as well as comments about folk music and Christianity later in the novel. Each type of history represents a form of recurrence that Ludvik would rather be without. The desire to lay the blame for all his failures on a single absurd event in the past, always before his eyes, has led him to pursue a needless act of revenge. Communism, "official history," has meant that once out of the Party he has no place in history. And the nostalgic belief in "origins" seems like mindless obedience to a set of rituals repeated aimlessly from the past. During a moment of revelation late in the novel, Ludvik says:

> Yes, suddenly I saw it clearly: most people deceive themselves with a pair of faiths: they believe in *eternal memory* (of people, things, deeds, nations) and in *redressibility* (of deeds, mistakes, sins, wrongs). . . . [Whereas] In reality the opposite is true: everything will be forgotten and nothing will be redressed.

And, in fact, Ludvik's revenge fails, even at the moment of his success. No longer a serious threat, Communism too becomes irrelevant to his personal life. And the Ride of the Kings will always contain a message

[4] THE JOKE, by *Milan Kundera*. The definitive version. HarperCollins. $25.00.

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which "will never be decoded, not only because there is no key to it, but also because people have no patience to listen."

Yet as in most of his novels since *The Joke* this vision of the quixotic unreliability of history is as liberating as it is a source of despair. Long before the current breakup of the Eastern bloc, the Hungarian Gyorgy Konrad's classic *Anti-Politics* argued that Russian-style, "official" Communism would increasingly become irrelevant because people would find the means to create spontaneous unofficial social, political, and economic organizations within the official state. And just as a country cannot do without some kind of organization it cannot eliminate history either.

History, recurrence, creates weight and depth and perspective. Painful as such knowledge may be, it provides us with identity and community, two things we will always need. Nonetheless, like Ludvik, we might prefer a version of history which is more humane, essentially private, contingent, semi-official, made up on the run. Perhaps that is what Eastern Europe is learning now, though it is a view of things which, like Nietzsche's myth of eternal return, may essentially be mad.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Physicist ABRAHAM PAIS* (b. 1918) is a native of the Netherlands, where his ancestors settled sometime before 1700, having fled the Iberian Inquisition. In 1946 he came to the U.S. (citizen since 1954) first as Fellow, then as Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. In 1963 he joined Rockefeller University in New York, where he is now Detlev W. Bronk Emeritus Professor. Since 1978 he has devoted himself to the history of science. In 1983, his Einstein biography, *Subtle Is the Lord . . .* (Oxford), won an American Book Award. His most recent book, *Niels Bohr's Times* (Oxford), was published in 1991. He received the Oppenheimer Prize in 1979 and the Physica Prize of the Netherlands in 1992. Also in that year he was named Officer of the Order of Oranje Nassau. The present article is an excerpt from his forthcoming autobiography. . . . THOMAS M. DISCH's* seventh collection of poetry, *Dark Verses and Light*, was published in 1991 by Johns Hopkins University Press, and his latest novel, *The M.D.: A Horror Story*, was reprinted by Berkley in 1992. He is the theater critic for *The Nation*. . . . "The Madhouse Nudes" is the first part of a novel-in-progress. ROBERT SCHULTZ is on leave from Luther College, working on the novel and on an essay entitled "When Men Look at Women" at the Virginia Foundation for the

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Humanities and Public Policy in Charlottesville, where he is currently a resident fellow.

WENDELL BERRY's most recent book is *Fidelity: Five Stories* (Pantheon). This fall Pantheon will publish a new collection: *Sex, Economy, Freedom, Community, and Other Essays.* . . . PATRICIA MEYER SPACKS, Edgar F. Shannon Professor of English and Department Chair at the University of Virginia, is currently completing a book on the cultural construction of boredom. . . . Over the last eight years ROBERT McDOWELL has worked as publisher and editor of Story Line Press and as an occasional guest lecturer at various universities. Previously, he has worked as an assistant professor, trade editor, and part-time farmer. . . . HAROLD FROMM's next article for *The Hudson Review* will be a review of *Wild Orchids and Trotsky*, edited by Mark Edmundson (Penguin Books). . . . A. R. AMMONS won the Lannan Poetry Award for 1992. His book-length poem *Garbage* is to be published this year by Norton. . . . HAYDEN CARRUTH recently retired from teaching in the Graduate Creative Writing Program at Syracuse University. His *Collected Shorter Poems, 1946–1991* has just won the 1992 National Book Critics Circle Award for poetry. . . . EMILY GROSHOLZ will be teaching at the Sewanee Writers' Conference and the Wesleyan Writers' Conference this summer. . . . BRUCE BEASLEY is the author of *Spirituals* (Wesleyan University Press, 1988). He teaches at Western Washington University. . . . MARCIA B. SIEGEL's biography of Doris Humphrey, *Days on Earth*, is being reissued in paperback this spring by Duke University Press.

RICHARD HORNBY is chairman of the department of theatre at the University of California at Riverside. . . . KAREN WILKIN,* who teaches a course in the history of art criticism at the University of Toronto, recently published a monograph on Georges Braque (Abbeville Press). . . . ROBERT S. CLARK has reviewed musical events for *The Hudson Review* for twenty years. . . . WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD's *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered* has just been reprinted by the University of Massachusetts Press. . . . SUSAN BALÉE teaches literature and writing at Beaver and Lafayette Colleges respectively. She lives in Haverford, Pennsylvania. . . . DAVID MASON is the author of *The Buried Houses* (Story Line Press, 1991). . . . DEAN FLOWER teaches American literature and modern fiction at Smith College. . . . GARY KRIST's second collection of stories, *Bone by Bone*, will be published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. . . . TOM WILHELMUS is Associate Dean of Liberal Arts at the University of Southern Indiana and co-directs the RopeWalk Writers Retreat with poet Matthew Graham.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

The Gestapo people came upstairs and went into the attic. One man carried a strong torchlight which at one point he shone straight at my panel. I could see the light through the crack—I can still see that light even as I write these lines. He played the light around for a while. Then they left. For the moment at least, I had escaped the most dangerous situation in my entire life. I kept on sitting in the tiny space, practically bent double, holding onto the panel.

—Abraham Pais, "The Impossible Real," p. 15.

By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, women were linked to heresy and "witches" faced persecution throughout Europe. In the late sixteenth century, the murder of women reached such heights that two French villages were left with only two women each. The church, denouncing alchemical heresy and female "enthusiasm," supported "doctrinally sound scientific inquiry," which took place in societies of males. By the seventeenth century, a series of important male scientists had articulated mechanistic theories, understood to support the order of church and state and to oppose the intellectual looseness of heresy. The first secretary of the British Royal Society, founded in 1660, proclaimed the society's purpose as "to raise a Masculine Philosophy . . . whereby the Mind of Man may be ennobled with the knowledge of Solid Truths." *Masculine* had become a definitive—if rarely defined—term of value.

—Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Scientific Grandiosities," p. 135.

What Graham constructed for herself over the ruins of the Hawkins idyll, re-imagined through dreams, myth, and an assiduously cultivated unconscious, was a series of central roles in a series of remarkable dances. The vengeful Jocasta wasn't the first but it was probably the most striking. All these women seek love in the wrong places. Or they struggle to find the ability to love, whereupon the dance can end. In her dances Graham focuses our sympathies on the woman's capacity for love. . . . The centrality of this woman's need, in effect a need to which everyone else is subject, explains why Graham was able to stay on the stage long after she could dance, and why she nearly had to destroy herself before she could leave the stage.

—Marcia B. Siegel, "Marthology," p. 183.

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